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**EUROPEAN URBANISM IN CARACAS (1870s-1930s)**

A thesis submitted to the Open University  
in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## EUROPEAN URBANISM IN CARACAS (1870s-1930s)

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The research focuses on the transfer of European urban ideas into Caracas, from Antonio Guzmán Blanco's urban reforms in the 1870s to the proposal of the 1939 Plan Monumental de Caracas, devised under the guidance of the French urbanist Maurice Rotival. Considering that the emergence of urbanism cannot be reduced to its mere technical contents - especially in the backward context of the Venezuela of that period - the research traces not only the transfer of urbanistic ideas, but also the importation which took place in the domains related to the Caraqueñians' urban culture and urbanity. At the same time, that urban transfer is not reduced to a deterministic effect of economic dependence, but is rather regarded as a component of the cultural relationship maintained by the Venezuelan elite with the most advanced countries of North Atlantic capitalism.

By tracing the transfer of urban ideas from Europe into Caracas - which remains the core issue of the research - a parallel question is explored: the reconstruction of the primary stages which articulated the urban debate in Venezuela and underpinned modern urbanism as a discipline, a process which apparently occurred against that European background. This reconstruction involves three episodes - the urban art of the Guzmanian city, the hygiene and progress of the *belle époque* and the monumental urbanism of the democratic capital - which are presented as components of a European-oriented cycle in the history of Caracas.

In order to trace that transfer and reconstruct those episodes, the research combines four types of urban discourse: the legal, political and administrative texts, the urban literature, the travel chronicles and general descriptions, and technical literature about urbanism. The interlacement of such a catalogue of specialized and non-specialized sources claims to be an innovation of the research.

For mamá,  
Maruja, Virginia and Carmen Teresa,  
señoritas of the European Caracas



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# I INTRODUCTION

"In comparing the planning of the cities of Latin America with that of the cities of the United States, it is at once apparent that her technicians have profited by closer contact with Europe. The result has been the development of two divergent types of cities in the Western Hemisphere: those of the United States, impressive but ungracious; and those of the Latin American countries, historic and Old World-like, but thoroughly delightful and human"

Francis Violich, *Cities of Latin America. Housing and Planning to the South* (1944)

## OLD WORLD-LIKE CITIES

1. When Francis Violich published his book *Cities of Latin America* (1944) - a sort of introduction, for the American audience, to the unknown urban reality of the rest of the continent - he repeatedly praised the gracious "Old World-like" character of the main Latin American metropolises, opposing it to the lack of genuine urban style in most North American cities. As major intercontinental differences, the planner also insisted on the attitude of South American public leaders, who "in general, have made a greater effort to leave behind public works and to take an active part in planning the physical development of their cities than have those of the United States" (1944: 34). He highlighted the contrast for the turn of the century, when the urban expansion of Latin American cities had taken place according to "the old traditions of planning in the grand manner":

"While in the United States our cities embarked upon expansion without an established nucleus, without a sense of civic form or dignity inherited from history, most Latin American cities had such a pattern for future growth. Not in every case did Latin American cities follow the old traditions of planning in the grand manner, but a general comparison today between our cities and theirs indicates a greater planlessness in the development of our urban environment. The early established civic discipline of Latin America has

served to endow their cities with a better feeling of form and urban character, which goes far to counteract some of the weakness in other respects" (Violich, 1944: 35).

The contrast between the cities of North and Latin America was noticeable up to the period when the book was written, namely the early 1940s, when most Latin capitals were still under the influence of European urbanism. But probably the contrast would not look so clear to Violich nowadays, when not only has the "weakness" of Latin metropolises undermined their urban balance, but also North American planning skills have been widely adopted throughout the continent. Nevertheless, Violich's early impressions recall a definitely European-oriented period of Latin American urban history, not experienced in the same way by North America. Although it is past, that period informed the conspicuous "Old World-like" image that some Latin capitals still offer in parts of their complex structures. Let us now revise the historiographic treatment subsequently given to that period, in order to provide a continental framework which could help us to understand - in the next section - the particularities of Caracas.

2. The political independence of Latin American colonies from Spain and Portugal - which came about in most of the continent during the 1820-1830s - did not imply either an economic or a cultural release from Europe. Britain assumed the economic predominance in the area, through the exploitation of those natural resources which were necessary for its expanding capitalism from the years of the Independence wars. If Britain thereby became the economic paradigm of progress and industrialization, France turned out to consolidate the cultural prestige that had already obtained since Encyclopedism. Translating both the European humanities and

urbanities for the young republics, France was consecrated as the civilized godmother of Latin America. With the connivance of local elites, the former colonies thus entered into an era of "neo-colonialism", which has been approached from different perspectives (Crawford, 1961; Griffin, 1961; Bradford, 1979).

From a materialistic point of view, the so-called School of Dependence has long since provided a historical matrix for understanding that neo-colonial era, including its economic, political and social dimensions (Cardoso and Faletto, 1969; Stein, 1970). In relation to the urban changes, the "urbanización dependiente" of Latin America was described according to the successive predominance of blocs of power which conditioned the post-colonial stages of capitalistic dependence. The urban results of such a succession have been explored in terms of the national patterns of cities and the structural problems of urbanization (Kaplan, 1972; Castells, 1977; Quijano, 1977; Rojman, 1977; Roberts, 1978). As a result of their materialistic logic and their macro-structuralism, some of these approaches end up overestimating the importance of economic dependence, and reducing the social changes to the imposition of cultural models from abroad.

3. The urban changes involved in the new dependence on Europe were epitomized by the so-called "bourgeois city" of Latin America, which bloomed in the second half of the nineteenth century in those countries which had been incorporated in the capitalistic circuits. Among other reforms intended to modernize their social structures, countries like Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Mexico decided to renovate the image of the up to then

untouched "colonial city", as well as to restructure their regional networks of urban settlements. The process of urban concentration in those expanding economies led to the emergence of a new type of "modern" or "bourgeois" city, whose Europeanism was evident in the physical transformations and the cultural ethos sponsored by economic groups, social elites and political leaders representing the new interests of commercial and industrial capitalism (Morse, 1971; 1975; 1990; Rofman, 1977).

One of the key issues of the transformation of the bourgeois city has to do with the urbanistic ideas arriving from Europe, and the *sui generis* way they were *transferred* into the Latin metropolises. Though it has been treated in morphological terms (Sica, 1977, II: 773-74; Gutiérrez, 1984), this is a question that remains quite unexplored in its theoretical dimension, which was approached on a continental scale by Hardoy. The Argentinian historian first highlighted "Haussmann's contributions" which had been made during the transformations of the bourgeois city from the late nineteenth century onwards. Some Latin American governments at that time undertook urban renewals in which the "baroque lines", the "tree-lined avenues" and the extensive public parks were taken for trademarks of the Haussmannian surgery. A second trend identified by Hardoy was "the Viennese influence" allegedly present in the early-twentieth-century plans for major capitals, where some elements of the *Städtebau* would have been used in a fragmentary way, as in the case of the Haussmannian urbanism. At the same time, more through the idea of the garden suburbs than through the original concept of new towns, the garden cities are also hinted at as having influenced the expansion of some Latin capitals during the first decades of this century. Although CIAM's and Le Corbusier's progressivism were to be determinant in the evolution of Latin American architecture in the second

third of the twentieth century, one can preliminarily conclude that the Haussmannian surgery and the Beaux-Arts tradition of French urbanism inspired a great many of the proposals for the bourgeois city, until the rise of the metropolises (Hardoy, 1989: 268-69; 1990: 26-41).

Nevertheless, having been spotted only as mere vectors starting from Europe, the theoretical interpretation of those urbanistic models in the different capitals of Latin America still has to be traced and proved thoroughly, as it has been for the cases of Rio and Buenos Aires (Needell, 1987; Crasemann, 1995). In this respect, the precise contents of all of those alleged influences on the bourgeois cities remain to be mapped according to the cultural geography of Latin America - where Caracas has not played an important role, judging by the omissions of urban historians.

4. As well as in terms of physical changes and urbanistic proposals, the European influence has been pursued in relation to the urban ideas, myths and fashions that informed the ethos of the bourgeois city in Latin America. As in the case of Europe, the portrayal of the bourgeoisie seems to be fundamental for understanding the urban mythology of that period, especially during the extravaganza of the so-called *belle époque* (Bairatti, 1978: 125-36). In this respect - besides the approach to the process of cultural transfer in terms of social theories which were applied to describe the modernization (Morse, 1978, 1990) - the urban historiography of Latin America provides two major approaches which have re-created the social climate of the Europeanized cities; both of them place special emphasis on the role played by local elites, whose cultural conflict with the backward realities of their countries often "provides a useful guide for the interpretation

of Latin American history" (Bradford, 1979: 13-14).

The ideological effects of European urban culture on Latin societies are included in the vast scope of José Luis Romero's *Latinoamérica. Las ciudades y las ideas* (1976). This showed beautifully how the bourgeois city displayed an ample imitation of Europe in terms of social customs, political ideas and literary trends up to the 1930s, on the eve of the emergence of the mass metropolises. Romero depicted how, in the domestic domain, the "French style" was not only ostensible in the architecture of bourgeois dwellings and shops, but also in the everyday imitation of the European way of life. On the urban scene, the piecemeal implementation of the "Haussmannian example" not only responded to the necessity of expanding local capitals, but also to the bourgeoisie's longing to appropriate the metropolitan myth coming from industrializing Europe. For the Frenchified elites of the Latin capitals, the invocation of Second-Empire Paris was thereby supposed to make possible the magic transformation of the post-colonial cities into real metropolises (Romero, 1984: 247-318).

The cultural change of the learned elites of Latin America is also portrayed in Angel Rama's *La ciudad letrada* (1984), an outstanding example of social semiology of the Latin metropolises through their literature. According to the Uruguayan critic's different terminology - but equivalent periods - the elitism of the post-colonial "ciudad letrada" had to be enhanced by the 1870s with the incorporation of new intellectual groups and activities resulting from the so-called liberal professions. The new class-structure copied from Europe thus consolidated the establishment of the "ciudad modernizada", led by the Latin bourgeoisie up to the 1930s. Since Rama highlighted the literary influences that shaped the "ciudad del modernismo" - which took over from



the romantic one - he illustrated how the ethos and conflicts of that city were especially traceable through the *dramatis personae* of contemporary novels and plays, which were highly influenced by European realism, naturalism and symbolism. Beyond the literary discourse, the author also stressed the Haussmannian example as a feature of the period, but recognized the original value of that imitation. Rather than a mere copy of Second-Empire Paris or other European models, there was a genuine re-creation due to the urban desire and fantasy, illusion and obsession of local elites excited by the metropolitan spirit - Rama insisted (1984: 71-104, 116).

*"...esa curiosa mezcla de costumbres francesas y españolas que se superpuso al misterio y azar de nuestra vida criolla y marcó el tono social de la pequeña metrópoli entre los últimos años del siglo XIX y los primeros cinco lustros del presente...."*

Mariano Picón-Salas, "Perfil de Caracas" (1951)

## THE CINDERELLA OF SOUTH AMERICA

5. Caracas was never mentioned in Violich's early report on the "Old World-like" cities, and has often been disregarded by Latin American urban historiographers as an example of Europeanization. Having been a second-rate capital of the Spanish empire, Caracas remained the Cinderella of South America up to the first decades of this century, when the oil bonanza fuelled an explosive growth which transformed the city into a "new Latin American capital", boasting a modernity comparable with that of Brasilia, and multilevel motorways "rivaling those of Los Angeles" - as Violich recognized many years later (Bailey and Nasatir, 1960: 666; Violich, 1975: 272, 279). The fierce modernity was to be more dramatic in the times to come: full of

skyscrapers and shopping centers, middle-class suburbs and shantytowns, today's Caracas reminds the visitor very little of its European lineage. However - despite its omission by Violich and the Latin historiographers - post-colonial Caracas apparently went through some European-oriented episodes up to the first decades of this century, when the American influence took possession of the embryonic metropolis. Let us now revise the treatment given to those episodes by the local historiography of the city, in order to understand better the particularities of the transfer of European urban ideas into Caracas.

The history of pre-metropolitan Caracas has been characterized by the Venezuelan writer Ramón Díaz Sánchez (1954) as a four-movement symphony: after the foundational "allegro", there supposedly came the Spanish Austrian "adagio" of the colonial city, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Later on, the eighteenth century witnessed the Borbones' "scherzo" and its "minuet" of Encyclopedism in the Caracas of Simón Bolívar. The symphony supposedly concluded with the "rondo" epitomized by Antonio Guzmán Blanco's urban reforms during the 1870s and 1880s. Despite its debatable musical or historical accuracy, Díaz Sánchez's image of the four-movement symphony quickly conveys the relative importance of the Guzmanian episode in Caraqueñan history. Whereas the first three "movements" mirrored long-lasting social eras in the political domination of the country, the eighteen-year "Guzmanato" sufficed to determine a new period in the history of the capital. Having confirmed the aforementioned continental parentage with Britain and France, Guzmán definitively broke in the case of Venezuela the post-colonial inertia of cultural dependence on Spain, thus modernizing Caraqueñan culture with a new urban apparatus imported from Europe, and especially from Second-Empire

Paris.

Besides the countless studies dealing with the period, the Guzmanian city has been specifically approached from different perspectives. A historical review of the highlights which informed the festive ethos of the period - epitomized by the 1883 *Exposición Nacional* - has been compiled by Castellanos (1983). Esteva-Grillet has explored the aesthetic basis of Guzmanian art (1986). Zawisza has thoroughly described the importance of the Guzmanato in terms of the public works for the capital and the rest of the country (1989a). From an architectural point of view, Gasparini (1978) has registered the vocabulary of the period, also providing interesting clues about its monumental architecture and urban design. On a more urbanistic scale, the brief but extremely interesting work by Galey (1973) summarized some of the legal, architectural and moral principles which made possible the Guzmanian ethos.

Nevertheless, Guzmanian Caracas has not been justly reconsidered in terms of the European roots of Guzmán's urban project, and especially in relation to his alleged interpretation of Haussmann's Paris - a question hinted at in most of the aforementioned studies. In this respect, a revision of Guzmanism from a European-based perspective, whereby there could be provided the international bearings of Guzmán's polemical project of modernization, seems to be necessary.

6. If Guzmanian Caracas was the Frenchified rondo of a three-century Spanish symphony, it represented at the same time the first movement of a European-oriented period in the history of the capital. As well as being

suggested by Díaz Sánchez, the idea of a new urban era opened by Guzmán's Europeanization has been hinted at from different perspectives by other Caraqueñan chroniclers. From a socioeconomic point of view, the essayist Mariano Picón-Salas defined that period as the "plutocratic" Caracas, thus featuring the dominant position of the agriculture-oriented plutocracy which led the country until the mid-1920s - when the Venezuelan economy turned to the exploitation and export of the newly-discovered oil resources (Picón-Salas, 1951: 136-39; Díaz Sánchez, 1954: 23-27). Though with fewer industrial bases, the plutocratic capital of pre-oil-exporting Venezuela could thus be said to be the equivalent of the bourgeois city in other Latin American countries.

Informed to a large extent by the extravaganza of the European *belle époque*, the cultural ethos of that plutocratic Caracas has perhaps been the major feature highlighted by later chroniclers who witnessed that period. Some of them have depicted post-Guzmanian Caracas as a petit Paris of the tropics, which curiously combined French fashions with the Andalusian picturesqueness inherited from the Spanish tradition (Cortina, 1976: 11; Meneses, 1995: 142-49). In the midst of the conspicuous Europeanism of that Caracas, Paris apparently prevailed as the cultural and academic centre of the world for the Venezuelan bourgeoisie; this prolonged worship of the "Ciudad Luz" remains as a keynote for our understanding of why - among other differences due to the *sui generis* nature of the concept - chroniclers attribute to the so-called "bella época caraqueña" a duration which goes far beyond the 1900s, when the *belle époque* reached its climax in Europe (García de la Concha, 1962: 229; Schael, 1966: 196-97; Muñoz, 1972; Cortina, 1976: 187; Nazoa, 1977). However, the veneration of Paris and Europe progressively faded after World War I, when North America's

growing presence in the oil-exporting Venezuela opened a new cycle in the cultural life of the capital. The Yankees' bad taste was thereafter rampant, the metropolitan myth of New York started to overtake that of glamorous Paris, and the charming ethos of the Caraquenian "bella época" was finished (Muñoz, 1972: 9; Meneses, 1995: 144).

Apart from the reminiscences of the *belle-époque* chroniclers, Venezuelan thinkers have traditionally proclaimed that the capital remained "asleep" during the obscure regimes of the dictators of that period: Cipriano Castro (1899-1908) and Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935) (Mijares, 1960: 155; Uslar Pietri, 1969: 165). The misconception of a sort of dark ages in Caraquenian evolution up to 1936 - when modern democracy arrived in the country - has been echoed in well-known histories of the city (Arellano, 1972; Polanco, 1983). Perhaps as a consequence of this black legend, the post-Guzmanian Caracas and the "bella época" have rarely been visited from the urbanistic point of view. The whole period was certainly spanned by Stann (1975), who demonstrated how the origins of the metropolitan modernity of Caracas dated back to changes in its urban geography between 1891 and 1936. In terms of urban structure, the true progress of the Gómez Caracas is still being discussed, given that no plan for the expansion of the city was undertaken (Di Pasquo, 1985; Morales Tucker and others, 1991: 91-102). The cruel "Gomezalato" has been vindicated, though, in terms of the national policies and investments in infrastructure which led to the emergence of Venezuela's modern planning (Caraballo, 1981; 1991; Martín, 1994). In cultural terms, the black legend of repression in Gómez's country has started to be dismantled by Segnini (1987, 1993). Despite all these new approaches - after the nostalgic chroniclers had finished their vivid yet fragmentary reports - the Europeanism of the "bella época" has not

been revisited from the perspective of urban epistemology.

7. The alleged obscurity of Gómez's Caracas was ended by the democratic changes of López Contreras's booming capital, epitomized by the design of the "Plan Monumental de Caracas" (PMC), led by the French urbanist Maurice Rotival in the late 1930s. Apart from rescuing Haussmannian grandeur, diverse components of French colonial urbanism were certainly present in Rotival's plan, whose major interest arises from its theoretical contents, given that most of the propositions were not carried out. As well as being severely criticized for its architectural and morphological eclecticism, the PMC has only been set in perspective against the later sprawl and modernity of metropolitan Caracas, which escaped the short-sighted Rotival, apparently more concerned with the grand manners of French urbanism (Zawisza, 1989; Jaua, 1991; Martín, 1991; Negrón, 1991).

Apart from being conceptualized as the timid beginning of Venezuela's modern urbanism, the PMC has also been recognized as a turning point in the destiny of Caracas. This is an overall perspective maintained by senior Venezuelan intellectuals, who witnessed the arrival of the French; the former always knew that the PMC represented the last opportunity for Caracas to be planned with European dignity. "Hasta ese punto llegó la tentativa y la posibilidad de asegurarle un porvenir urbano digno a Caracas", the Venezuelan essayist Arturo Uslar Pietri has recently commented in his nostalgic revision of "La Caracas que no fue" (1991: 8). Indeed, the metropolitan capital of the oil-exporting country rapidly deserted the harmonious development of the colonial and bourgeois city, both in morphological and cultural terms. In the midst of the oil bonanza, and with

the connivance of populist politicians, the metropolitan Caracas lost control over the scale, style and harmony of its urban sprawl, whilst uncontrolled immigration made it regress to the "semi-barbarian" state of the pre-Guzmanian city (Nazoa, 1977: 268; Boulton, 1995<sup>1</sup>).

## EUROPEAN CARACAS: THE QUESTION OF TRANSFER

8. After the foregoing revision of its urban historiography, one can conclude that Caracas was apparently the recipient of an urban transfer from Europe - a transfer which has been neither justly appreciated nor comprehensively approached by continental or local historians, respectively. The correction of such a historical neglect seems especially urgent, since the urban culture and urbanism of modern Caracas were presumably shaped during that European-oriented period, despite their conspicuous Americanization in the metropolitan era. Therefore, the main question of this research is to deal with the *transfer of European urban ideas into Caracas* from the Guzmanian reforms until the Rotival proposal, a period which put an end to the Spanish image of the post-colonial capital and preceded the Americanization of the contemporary metropolis. Two particulars must be highlighted in relation to the way the transfer of urban ideas is to be pursued in this research.

First, considering that the emergence of urbanism as a discipline cannot be reduced to its mere technical contents - especially in the backward context of the Venezuela of that period - the research must trace not only the transfer of urbanistic ideas, but also the importation which took place in the domains related to the Caraquenians' urban culture and urbanity. In respect of this, a

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<sup>1</sup> Don Alfredo Boulton, Letter to author, July 27

sampling of the elite's importations from Europe will illuminate the transference of urban ideas, since "technical" urbanism would emerge, to some extent, as a chapter of that catalogue. For this reason, women's fashions and Carnival extravaganzas will be considered, so to speak, as meaningful as monumental edifices or legal dispositions. This premise is especially valid when evoking periods of lavish fantasy - such as that of Second-Empire Paris or *belle-époque* Europe - and when dealing with cities like Caracas, whose modest scale often prevented foreign influences from materializing in physical terms. By working more on the level of the ideas than on the actual transformations of the city, the research also attempts to trace the urban myths of Europe which have informed the cultural evolution of Caracas, and particularly the Parisian myth, which apparently subjugated the Caraqueñians' dreams long after the end of the *belle époque*.

Secondly, the urban transfer will not be reduced to a deterministic effect of economic dependence, but will rather be regarded as a component of the cultural relationship maintained by the Venezuelan elite with the most advanced countries of North Atlantic capitalism. By exploring the nature and extent of the urban importation as a result of the dependent elite's cultural needs, the unidirectional and deterministic contents of colonialist concepts must incorporate ingredients of the local situation; in other words, the notion of cultural colonialism has to be replaced by that of cultural re-creation. This is a level of analysis achieved by Romero's and Rama's interpretations of the cultural process of Latin American cities - which certainly become methodological references for this research. As the Argentinian historian demonstrated, in the case of the urban cultures and subcultures of Latin America, it is always necessary to understand "cómo juega el desarrollo



heterónimo de las ciudades con su desarrollo autónomo" (Romero, 1984: 20).

9. By tracing the transfer of urban ideas from Europe into Caracas - which remains the core issue of this research - a parallel question can be illuminated: the reconstruction of the primary stages that articulated the urban debate in Venezuela and underpinned modern urbanism as a discipline, a process which apparently occurred against that European background. The epistemological review of the period as a whole seems to be convenient for the three episodes involved, each of which requires a fresh look for particular reasons.

Unlike traditional approaches to Guzmanian Caracas, this review must go beyond the search for the architectural or urbanistic elements of Haussmannian Paris which were impossible to implant in the tiny capital of the Guzmanato; instead, the subtler domains of its urban life must be penetrated in order to explore the European values of the Guzmanian culture. At the same time, such a revision must also include the way in which Guzmán's project shaped the Caraquenians' culture and consciousness about the city, and how that project underpinned later stages which led to the emergence of Venezuela's modern urbanism.

In relation to the Caraquenian "bella época", there is need for a review which goes beyond the chroniclers' reminiscences, in order to recover the urban myths and conflicts which forged a new modernity in Caraquenian culture. At the same time - from a more technical point of view - it is necessary to explore whether there occurred urbanistic breakthroughs during the sombre

regimes of the Andean dictators, in which case it might be demonstrated that the *belle-époque* capital was not so soundly asleep as is traditionally believed.

Lastly, Rotival's proposal must be set in perspective against the European décor of the aforementioned episodes - namely, the Guzmanian rondo and the "bella época" - whose urbanistic continuity is precisely to be confirmed by the Caraquenians' selection of the French tradition, a paradox at a moment when the Venezuelan society was already penetrated by American influences. By shifting the way it has traditionally been approached, the PMC could then be explained as the delayed but grand culmination of an epoch of French-oriented aspirations, and not only as the timid beginning of an era of dubious modernity.

"Qué dijo de Caracas Teresa de la Parra? Todo lo que en aquel momento contenía la ciudad. Toda la verdad que millares de mujeres sentían entonces."

Guillermo Meneses, *Caracas en la novela venezolana* (1966)

## A PLURALITY OF URBAN DISCOURSES

10. Looking at the plurality of urban discourses which must be considered in a research of this type - where history and epistemology are to be intimately related to each other - one can categorize such a diversity in terms of what Michel Foucault labelled the historical conditions for the emergence of an epistemological discourse. These "conditions pour qu'apparaisse un objet de discours, ... pour qu'il s'inscrive dans un domaine de parenté avec

d'autres objets, pour qu'il puisse établir avec eux des rapports de ressemblance, de voisinage, d'éloignement, de différence, de transformation ... sont nombreuses et lourdes". Including institutions, economic and social processes, ways of behaviour, systems of rules, etc., those conditions frame a space of epistemological dispersion, whence some non-traditional "formations discursives" have emerged (Foucault, 1992: 53, 61). Such a space of epistemological dispersion is methodologically necessary when dealing with the appearance of urbanism in general - a discipline which everywhere emerged from diverse discourses. At the same time, a broad approach seems to be especially suitable to embrace comprehensively the object of this particular research, which is not only technical urbanism, but also urban culture and public consciousness of the city in Caraquénian society under the aegis of European modernity.

Foucault's instances of the emergence, delimitation and specification of a discursive formation can also be recalled as preliminary notions which describe the formative process of a discipline from diverse discourses (1992: 60). In order to track such a process in this particular research, the early stages of modern Caraquénian urbanism are going to be put in perspective with the development of the European movement, thus providing international bearings for the scientific origins of that discipline in Venezuela - which have long been missing. For that purpose, in each of the episodes involved, the categories provided by urban historiographers who have specifically dealt with the emergence of modern urbanism in Europe - such as Lavedan (1926), Bardet (1939, 1951), Poëte (1939), Choay (1965, 1969) and Sutcliffe (1980, 1981), among others - should be considered.

11. As Henri Lefebvre demonstrated long ago, urban myths and literature have often anticipated the conceptual evolution of the urbanistic object with more accuracy than the alleged "specialized" or "technical" approaches (1979: 139-54). The great significance of non-specialized literature for tracing the origins of modern urbanism is mainly due to the latter's peripheral location among preceding disciplines and discourses - an epistemological position which makes urbanism interdisciplinary from the theoretical to the methodological level (Schmidt-Relenberg, 1976; Almandoz, 1993: 627-30). This heterogeneity also means that the historical research on urbanism often has to deal with a variety of discourses - from the non-specialized literature which heralds the forthcoming discipline in a particular context to the increasingly specialized agenda generated by urban technicians. Such a diversity seems to be especially necessary - let us say it once again - when the research not only seeks the origins of technical urbanism, but also the shaping of urban culture and the awakening of public consciousness about the city in a particular society.

When registering the urban discourses which heralded urbanism in the Venezuelan context from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, four major groups appear to be worth exploring: the legal, political and administrative texts, the urban literature, the travel chronicles and general descriptions, and the technical literature about the city. Though they did not rival the urbanistic produce of European or the major Latin American capitals, those strands apparently sufficed to shape the Caraqueños' modern urban culture, from Guzmánian times up to the emergence of modern urbanism during the democratic renovation. This is why - without denying the existence of other possible discourses - those four types of texts are to be assumed as the primary sources of this research, which can thus be seen as a

methodological premise.

Such a catalogue of primary sources has never before been assembled in the urban historiography of Caracas. On the one hand, specialized approaches have tended to be based upon the legal and technical documents, dismissing the importance of chronicles and literature. On the other hand, the modern chronicle has nostalgically clung to Caraquenian reminiscences, without attempting to explore the cultural foundations of the urban ethos - as often happened with the chroniclers of the "bella época". Therefore, a contribution of this research might be the interlacement of a unique historical and epistemological discourse about the Europeanized Caracas, in which fleeting visitors' appraisals of the city could be contrasted with the resentments and frustrations of the *dramatis personae* of the urban literature, while the Venezuelan rulers' projects and dispositions could be assessed in terms of contemporary technicians' expertise.

12. Let us now try to characterize each type of discourse. Starting with the legal texts, presidential decrees and municipal ordinances were the basic instruments of regulation for the urban agenda of Caracas throughout the period to be considered; they were originally published in the *Gaceta Oficial* and the *Gaceta Municipal del Distrito Federal*. Although ordinances are supposed to be the specific legislation for the city, decrees are also helpful in recognizing the Venezuelan rulers' urban projects, particularly in the case of Guzmán Blanco. Those projects can also be understood through administrative documents - basically the annual *Memorias* of the Ministerio de Obras Públicas (MOP) and the Gobernación del Distrito Federal (GDF) - where organizational innovations were explained and official expenditure on

the city was justified. The impact of governmental projects can be evaluated by sampling the political debate of each period, including presidential speeches and memoirs, virulent manifestos by opponents, and historical descriptions which could not abandon their political allegiances.

Secondly, two main genres of urban literature are to be considered. On the one hand, there is the *costumbrista* literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shaped in sketches of Caraquenian life which provide an indispensable source for understanding the social impact of European fads, from the Guzmanian rondo to the opening of the *belle époque*. In this connection, the fusion between literature and urban culture can also be appreciated in the periodical variety of *El Cojo Ilustrado* (1892-1915), which fortnightly reported the glamorous ethos of post-Guzmanian Caracas and the "bella época". At the turn of the century, on the other hand, the appearance of the first novels set in the capital mirrored the Caraquenians' vigorous and polemical debate about their city, civilization and urban culture during the periods of Castro and Gómez. Novels like *Todo un pueblo* (1899), *Idolos Rotos* (1901), *El Cabito* (1909), *Vidas oscuras* (1916), *La casa de los Abila* (1921-22), *Ifigenia* (1924) and *La Trepadora* (1925), among others, not only illustrate the Caraquenians' varied attitudes in relation to the myth of Paris and other metropolises of civilization and progress, but also reveal the hidden miseries of the pseudo-European Caracas of the dictatorships. Those novels are a kind of window which allows us to peruse, at one and the same time, the effects of a new urban modernity on both the public and private domains. Torn between these two realms, Caraquenian women arise as a particularly interesting group who opposed and defied the provincialism of the parochial capital, especially in the cases of the señoritas of de la Parra and Gallegos, who did not want to remain any longer the domestic "heroínas

de patio" but to become truly urban personae (Meneses, 1966: 195-208; Picón Salas, 1984: 166-67). Finally, it must be said that the so-called "cronistas" of the "bella época" - most of whose rich testimonies have been produced in the second half of this century - are therefore to be considered as a part of the secondary sources, though some of those chroniclers were original witnesses of the period.

Thirdly, there are the travel chronicles and general descriptions of Caracas and its society - a fascinating discourse which has rarely been used in Venezuela's urban historiography. Most of them having been written by foreigners who visited the city or lived there during the period to be considered, the travellers' impressions help to put in perspective the actual progress of Caracas in relation to other capitals which had been visited before. Through these chronicles one can, in particular, reconstruct the foreigners' image of Caracas in the second part of the nineteenth century - when many of these urban reports are concentrated. Starting with the dismal picture of pre-Guzmanian Caracas provided by mid-nineteenth-century visitors, one can note the increasingly favourable impression that the city made on travellers, throughout the Guzmanato but especially during the 1883 Exposición Nacional. Nevertheless, it is necessary to read cautiously the enthusiastic descriptions by guests of the Guzmanian court, whose illustrative reports of urban progress and civilization were sometimes intended to flatter their host. The visitors' portrayals of later Venezuelan rulers and their entourages are also to be used, especially for the polemical figure of Gómez; as in the case of Guzmanian chronicles, those descriptions are more valuable for their foreign perspective than for their historical accuracy.

Technical literature, the last in chronological order, provides us with the urban professionals' vocabulary and their agenda for dealing with the city. With the exception of some treatises and books written by senior scientists, that literature was basically published in the scant periodicals and technical magazines which started with the twentieth century - but not on a scale comparable to the bibliographical variety of European capitals. It was mainly in the *Gaceta Médica de Caracas*, the *Revista Técnica del Ministerio de Obras Públicas* and the *Revista Municipal del Distrito Federal*, where new hygienical concepts, the evolution of modern European architecture and the expansion of Caracas were originally reported and discussed, before the urban debate reached the national newspapers, especially during the late democratic period. A unique importance is acquired by the PMC at the end of the research, not only for the urbanistic contents related to its own moment, but also as a technical document through which some of the pending questions of the previous episodes are to be given a final explanation.

13. Some final remarks must be made in relation to the structure, the coverage and the style of the following discourse, inasmuch as they mirror theoretical and methodological assumptions. Starting with the structure, the main question of this research - namely the transfer of European urban culture into the Caraquénian context - is to be attempted through three chapters which correspond to the three episodes of the European-oriented period of Caracas. Whilst not intended as either a history or geography of the city during the period considered, that episodic structure seems to be especially suitable for combining the historical and epistemological aims of the research, by focusing on the Caraquénian chapters which involved



epistemological breakthroughs.

The coverage of the research must also be delineated. The process of the transfer and emergence of Caraquenian urbanism is to be compared with the evolution of the urban discipline both in Europe and in Latin America. The latter will only stand as a background which will provide significant elements of the continental process - with most of the information drawn from secondary sources. Although some concepts and categories will be borrowed from European urban historiography, they are going to be presented according to the theoretical necessities for understanding the Caraquenian process. In this respect, there is no theoretical chapter as such for the whole thesis, but rather a theoretical section in each episode, in which the international debate of the urbanistic discipline will be updated progressively. Despite this piecemeal conceptualization, the research still claims to pursue not only the historical merit of describing the urbanistic transfer into Caracas, but also the theoretical value of an epistemology through a micro history. Such an epistemological attempt can be said to be historical inasmuch as history here allows urbanism to accomplish a critical function of itself - one of the roles that De Certeau attributes to history when working in service of the modern sciences (1975: 92-96).

Instead of seeking the tone of a scientific dissertation, the following text aspires to be read as an essay peppered with a touch of narrative. That combination has been adopted not only for the flexibility permitted by essays, but also because of the epistemological and ontological choices entailed by the narrative discourse as a theoretical tool - choices which I would like to explore, as a firm believer in the "contents of the form" (White, 1987: ix-xi). At the same time, that combination is perhaps more attractive for

conveying an intriguing chapter of Caraquenian history to foreign readers, an audience which this discourse wishes to consider just as much as Caraquenians, who will probably find the text sometimes too general or basic. If Caraquenian urbanism is to be given its international bearings, urbanists of other latitudes might possibly feel encouraged by these means to learn more about the Cinderella of South America.

## II GUZMANIAN URBAN ART

"Oh! La Francia, tan justamente erguida por su suficiencia en las ciencias históricas, políticas y sociales; la Inglaterra, tan contemplativa de sus intereses comerciales"

D. F. Sarmiento, Prologue (1851) to *Civilización y Barbarie* (1845)

### THE BINOMIAL DEPENDENCE ON EUROPE

1. Unlike for other semi-colonial areas of Asia and Africa - whose modernization was copied from the same metropolis during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - the incorporation of Latin America within modern capitalism and Western civilization has been a long pilgrimage guided by different metropolises. Spain and Portugal during the colonial era, Britain and France during the early republican period, and the United States during most of the twentieth century have set the rules of the Latin Americans' peripheral modernization. The multiple effects of those successive types of political, economic and cultural domination have been the main reason for Latin American backwardness, according to the materialistic explanation provided by the so-called School of Dependence (Castells, 1977: 50; Palma, 1978: 881). Some of the urban-related postulates of the theory, including many factors of a complex matrix which has lately been dismissed as historical justification, are still worth calling upon in order to characterize Latin American dependence in the post-colonial era.

First of all, the notion of dependence must not be mistaken for absolute backwardness or lack of progress and development - which, on the contrary, did take place in nineteenth-century Latin America, especially in the urban field. Instead, dependence should rather be associated with the adjustment

and orientation of the economic, political and social structure to conditions established by commanding elites which represented the foreign interests invested in the export sector of each nation. Instead of involving a situation of antagonism or domination, the dependence thus meant a "correspondence" of the local elites' own interests with the demands of foreign groups; a connivance which was increased inasmuch as commercial diversification of the national economies took place throughout the nineteenth century (Quijano, 1977: 156; Roberts, 1978: 46, 60). At the same time, the dependence did not always imply a passive attitude on the part of the dependent society, but rather the latter's "concrete expression" and re-creation of the manifestations produced in the dominant bloc - a creative aspect of the relationship which turns out to be especially significant in cultural terms (Palma, 1978: 910).

Secondly, the dependence was due in most cases to an outward-oriented economy which imposed similar conditions on other dimensions of the social matrix. Indeed, the assumption by Latin America of its role as producer within the nineteenth-century international division of labour implied a reinforcement of the "outward-oriented model of growth" coming from colonial times. The Latin republics thereby settled for a different historic destiny in relation to the United States, which had adopted an "inward-oriented" model of growth from the 1820s Great Turn About (Morse, 1975: 270-71). A concrete and dramatic manifestation of that economic distortion was the "dependent urbanization" of most countries, whose feeble urban networks coming from colonial times were expanded according to the requirements of foreign capital during the republican era (Castells, 1977: 44; Rofman, 1977). From the nineteenth century on, this economic outwardness also brought about the local elites' association of "modern" with all that had

to do with the exportation sector and everything foreign in general, whereas "traditional" remained associated with activities linked with domestic production and consumption (Cardoso and Faletto, 1969: 42-48).

Thirdly, two major stages have been distinguished in the post-colonial dependence of Latin America. After the political independence, the "capitalistic commercial domination" was obviously different from the colonial regime, since the legitimacy of new republics for trading was internationally recognized. Nevertheless, their conditions of commercial exchange were still unfair, both in terms of the undervaluation of their raw materials and the overestimation of the manufactured products imported by the former colonies. This phase was dominated by Britain until World War I, when the United States took over the hegemony of the area, launching a new era of the "imperialist" penetration of North American capital in both the exploitation of local resources and the process of industrialization, which was starting at that time (Kaplan, 1972: 99; Quijano, 1977: 158, 165-66).

The post-colonial dependence also involved a process of cultural importation - hinted at though not explored enough from the perspective of the School of Dependence. The outward-oriented societies tried to modernize themselves by importing from the new metropolises social and cultural patterns whose conspicuous display took place mainly in the capitals. Up to the end of World War I, it was France which prevailed as the European model of civilization imitated by the Latin American bourgeoisie; thereafter, the United States introduced their progressive extravaganza (Griffin, 1961: 83-84; Romero, 1984).

2. The economic and cultural relationship of Latin America with Europe can be portrayed as a binomial dependence which launched an era of "neo-colonialism" for the young republics. The historic bonds of that new dependence can be traced back to the last period of the colonial regime. Due to both the weakened position of Spain and Portugal in Europe and the pressures exerted by Creole groups, there had been gradual concessions for the colonies to escape from the metropolitan hegemony during the eighteenth century. Even before the Independence wars were completed, Latin American possessions had expanded their commercial and cultural exchanges with other European countries, especially with Britain and France. During the post-independence years, the Pyrenees were perceived by local elites as the southern frontier of modern Europe; Britain and France were thereafter confirmed as the real alternatives to the economic, political and cultural backwardness represented by Iberian metropolises (Stein, 1970: 105, 137, 168; Pagden, 1995: 154). Britain was chosen, so to speak, as the economic godfather of the young republics, whereas France was confirmed as their cultural godmother - a peripheral yet useful honour for the European countries, especially in restraining the emergence of the United States as a continental superpower.

After its position in post-Napoleonic Europe was strengthened, once the cycle of the Independence wars was mostly completed with its help, the British Empire harvested more than a century of sustained interest in Latin America. Britain openly became the main customer for the traditional staples produced by the new republics, which not only assumed their function as suppliers of raw materials for English industrialization but also relied upon British trade and loans for their incipient economies. In terms of capital investment and the supply of technology, the predominance of Britain was

more evident from the 1850s up to the 1900s, including two marked booms during the 1880s and in the decade following 1902. After that period, the United States was to have an increasing presence which would overtake British capital from World War I (Rippy, 1944: 239; 1959: 11, 36; Griffin, 1961: 25, 57).

Although they were not numerous, the British possessed an economic supremacy which was the fact that most struck and pleased Michael G. Mulhall in his report *The English in South America* (1878):

"It may appear surprising that in a continent twice the size of Europe, where the total number of English residents is hardly equal to the population of Chester or Carlisle, and does not reach one in 800 of the inhabitants, the English element has in a few years been able to make its impress felt in a greater degree than any other foreign nationality. This appears mainly owing to the influence of British capital and trade." (Mulhall, 1878: 599).

The author certainly had reasons to be proud. The "leading merchants" took to Latin America technological devices and manufactures which allowed those nearly-preindustrial ex-colonies to sample the forthcoming industrial era for the first time. Among other inventions, machinery for mining, steam engines and railways were introduced in the new republics by English companies and citizens, which shared with Americans and Germans the privilege of launching most of the devices of the industrial era until the beginning of this century (Rippy, 1944: 19,189).

For these reasons, the relationship of nineteenth-century Latin America with the British Empire cannot be reduced to a mere commercial domination - as the dependence theorists have sometimes tried to do. British commercial interests in the new republics certainly broke the brief dream of

independence, generating neo-colonial bounds for an "informal imperialism" which reinforced the colonial heritage of the area (Stein, 1970: 137, 154-55). Nevertheless, due to the Britons' technological and commercial embassy, the Latin republics invested prosperous Britain with all the meanings of progress, industrialization, innovation and so forth. At the same time, the former colonies were allowed a stable *modus vivendi* by liberal England, which proudly assumed the tutelage of the new republics in "the arts of peace" (Griffin, 1961: 111). As Mulhall declared, "Whatever may be the fortunes of South America during the next fifty years, one thing seems certain, that its development in the arts of peace will be in a great manner identified with the growth of its relations with Britain." (1878: 600). And the Englishman was right - as we shall see.

3. Although France was economically present in Latin America during the eighteenth century, her predominance among the former colonies was social and cultural. Taking the lead of European Enlightenment in the New World, French philosophers had imbued the creole intelligentsia which championed the crusade for Independence and early republicanism. The prestige achieved by Rousseau's France was maintained throughout the nineteenth century, from Saint-Simon's social reformism and Renan's freethinking to Comte's and Taine's positivism. France thereby was considered not only as a philosophical power but also as the main translator of contemporary European thinking for the Latin world (Hussey, 1942: 49; Crawford, 1961: 8; Pagden, 1995: 178-200).

Even by the 1820s, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento pointed out in his *Facundo* (1845) - an early result of the new dependence on Anglo-French Europe -



that "la desespañolización i la europeificación" of Argentina's urban society was already evident; all Europeans arriving in Buenos Aires believed they were in Parisian salons, since not even the characteristic French petulance was lacking (1889: 98-102). Through the foremost case of Buenos Aires, the Argentinian statesman and writer thus anticipated a French-oriented culture which spread across the continent for more than a century. That is what the Argentinian man of letters Manuel Ugarte later called "la segunda conquista", paralleling the fifteenth-century occupation of the vast land by the Spanish with the nineteenth-century subjugation of its people by French thought (1911: 77). Even though that supremacy would not be so absolute by the turn of the twentieth century, the Peruvian writer Francisco García Calderón still proclaimed on the eve of World War I, "France has been the teacher of social life and letters to the American democracies" - a tutelage that he praised gratefully as one of the main traits of the "Latin spirit" (1913: 287).

As well as being a leader in social change and philosophical thought, France also became the paradigm of fine arts and civilization, refinement and urbanity for the young republics. Though recognizing the German and Italian influences on the letters and sciences of post-colonial Latin America, the Venezuelan sociologist Gil Fortoul identified the French predominance in "la vida elegante, en la moda y en el arte" as a feature of the "social race" of the new republics (1896: 29-30). In a similar way, when mapping the influence of Southern-European immigration on this Latin American "race", Ugarte accurately defined that spiritual yet powerful influence of France for embellishing the life in the continent.

"Más que con sus inmigrantes, difundió Francia su influencia con su pensamiento. Sin embargo, ha contribuido también poderosamente á

nuestra elaboración social, no en el sentido de componente, porque el francés, poco numeroso, no se ha confundido á menudo con los elementos del país, sino en el de fuerza indicada para embellecer la vida" (Ugarte, 1911: 62).

Fascinated by the European prestige of France as the main recipient of the classical tradition, Latin America had also turned to French artistic canons since early republican times. Especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, the emergent bourgeoisie favoured by the export boom adopted a so-called French style in different aspects of domestic and public life in the cities. Over the conspicuous imitation of European manners in general, Second-Empire Paris became the archetype of urban modernity and refinement for Latin American elites till the 1930s (Griffin, 1961: 83-84; Rama, 1984: 116).

The supremacy of Second-Empire France as a paradigm of civilization did not exclude the social utility of some ideas taken from Victorian England; both of them often worked together as a cultural duo in nineteenth-century Latin America (Romero, 1984: 284). The association took place for instance in social evolutionism. Victorian England's evolutionist philosophy provided the clue for the local adaptation of the French philosophers' avant-garde ideologies, which sometimes were not suitable for the local context. This was so in the case of Comte's positivism, which stressed social harmony more than individual liberty - an ideal far from being reached in the contrastive societies of Latin America. Instead, Spencer's social Darwinism turned out to be more appropriate and realistic: starting from Darwin's evolutionism, the English philosopher pointed at social evolution towards individual liberty from state intervention, according to the model provided by Victorian England. Social harmony thereby became more feasible in the long term,

thus providing a realistic alternative to oligarchic Latin America (Griffin, 1961: 117; Bradford, 1979: 15-16). In addition to social Darwinism, social protocol and moral decorum were among the Victorian ingredients which Latin American elites and rulers added to their Frenchified projects throughout the nineteenth century. The progressive godfather and the civilized godmother thus performed more than one duet in the modernization of the young republics, with intriguing effects on their capitals.

"And now how shall I describe Caracas? Imagine a robin's nest, three thousand feet above the sea-level, its sides some two thousand feet deep, its interior dimensions say eight miles by three or four, while in the centre, for eggs, you have the city. Sinbad the Sailor should have located his roc's nest here. Looked down upon from the mountain, Caracas, with its flat red-tiled roofs, has the appearance of a brick-yard surrounded by a garden; the only noticeable break in its uniformity being the white cathedral and its little Plaza."

"Caracas", in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (July 1858)

#### A CAPITAL WITH SOME SALONS BUT NO PALACES

4. From the first half of the nineteenth century there had occurred in Latin America a national diversification of the export economies. Cattle raising in Argentina and Uruguay, mining in Chile and Mexico, the running of coffee plantations in Brazil and sugar plantations in Cuba allowed the new republics to benefit from the competitiveness of their former colonial staples within international trade circuits. Boosted by the arrival of European capital and immigration to those countries from the 1860s onwards, commercial prosperity brought about regional differences of development across the continent: on the one hand, the non-tropical Atlantic shore and Chile thereafter became the leaders of the "era of economic expansion", which

would last until World War I. On the other hand, the rest of the Andean countries had a rather minor importance for international capitalistic blocs, especially for Britain, whose investments in that region were "nominal" until the end of the century (Rippy, 1959: 12, 116; Griffin, 1961: 25, 88-89, 126; Vetencourt, 1981: 77-79).

During his journey across South America in the early 1880s, the Argentine Miguel Cané could already notice those differences: "Los países americanos situados sobre el Atlántico han sentido más rápida e intensamente la acción de la Europa, fuente indudable de todo progreso material, y han conseguido emanciparse más pronto de la rémora colonial" (1942: 11). To the contrary, Mulhall summarized the pessimistic prospect for small English capital in Venezuela, Bolivia, Nueva Granada and Ecuador: "The amount of British capital in these 4 republics is trifling and consists almost wholly of loans raised in England, a great portion of which may be considered as so much money lost." (1878: 530). However, it seems that the money was not so trifling and Lord Palmerston's government was not so disposed to lose it either, at least in the Venezuelan case. Edward B. Eastwick was sent to the country in 1864 as Financial Commissioner for the General Company of Credit, in order to assess the actual means of the South American republic for paying back its loans. Though recognizing that there was a debt for the considerable "pecuniary assistance" given to Venezuela by England, Eastwick turned out to adopt a conciliatory tone with the insolvent and still feeble country. He reminded the British reader of the historic links of Venezuela with England, which had been the closest European nation allied to the young republic during its struggle against Spain:

"It is undeniable that Venezuela has derived nothing but advantage from her intercourse with England. It has been shown how British troops took a

prominent part in winning the independence of Venezuela; and how, in all the most critical emergencies, England was ever ready to supply funds, by the aid of which Venezuela recovered from exhaustion. And if such has been the past, the future is expected to be like it, if Venezuela, the recipient of so many favours, will but reciprocate friendship and maintain her engagements." (Eastwick, 1868: 321, 341).

The Comissioner's plea foresaw the ambivalent tone of the Anglo-Venezuelan relationship during the rest of the century. The English collaboration in the Independence saga would always be called up at any embarrassing moments due to financial conflicts or territorial disputes. But that collaboration had cost Venezuela the acceptance of uneven trade terms established in binational agreements, signed by the unwary republic in 1825 and 1835. The "illusion of reciprocity" created in these agreements converted Venezuela into a marginal yet captive semi-colony of the informal imperialism of Britain, which would stand throughout the nineteenth century as the first exporter of manufactured goods to the Venezuelan economy, while being barely its fourth customer. The economic trauma of its relationship with Britain would mark Venezuelan society, whose post-colonial history was in large measure a complex argument among the national elites to adjust to the terms of North Atlantic trade (Carl, 1980: 31-47; Vetencourt, 1981: 69, 99-100, 112-15, 183; Lombardi, 1982: 160). However, Eastwick was still right: becoming the model of progress for the modernizing project to take place in the young country, Britain would remain as one of the closest European "allies" of Venezuela during the rest of the century.

5. Despite economic diversification and political independence, there were

no major changes in the urban geography of Latin America until the second half of the nineteenth century. Since the 1750s, there had been an obscure period of urban stagnation, whose gloomiest phase coincided with the peak of civil wars and upheavals that devastated the new republics in the early years of independence. Among other effects, the volatile political climate brought about a process of decentralization and "ruralization" of the backward societies, with further stagnation of the administrative urban structures coming from the colonial regime (Morse, 1975: 266-68; 1990: 8-9).

Demographic urban changes started to be noticeable from the 1860s onwards. The "primacy dip" - which had plunged the growth rate of capital cities below national growth during the previous obscure decades - was overcome by the middle of the century. Latin capitals pulled ahead of the national growth rate according to the following order: Havana (1840s), Rio (1850s), Lima and Buenos Aires (1860s), Bogotá (1870s), Caracas and Santiago (1880s), and Mexico City at the turn of the century. The domestic importance of the capitals must be set in perspective with the absolute gaps among different countries and the general tendency of the continent. On the whole, former viceregal metropolises yielded attraction to capitals of the new expanding economies - a tendency which can be confirmed by a quick look at the figures of the takeoff for the capitals. Buenos Aires was about 90,000 by the 1850s and jumped to 178,000 by 1869; Rio already had 186,000 by 1854 and increased to 267,000 in 1872; Santiago was 115,000 for 1865; Havana, which already had 130,000 by 1847, went up to 197,000 by 1861; mostly due to its former colonial splendour, Mexico City already had 200,000 by 1855, but only increased to 210,000 by 1862, whereas Lima had only 89,000 by 1862, and Bogotá kept its moderate 40,000 from the mid-1820s up to 1870. Meanwhile, Caracas had 47,013 by 1869 and barely rose to

48,897 by the 1873 census - a modest increase which can only be paralleled with the case of Bogotá (*Primer Censo*, 1874: 77; Landaeta, 1889, I: 137; Morse, 1971: 5-6)<sup>1</sup>.

Although by the 1880s the urban growth of Caracas certainly was to increase as much as its regional role was to excel its colonial past, this past had actually been so undistinguished that it would take many decades to be overcome. Beyond the stagnation due to domestic wars, the backwardness of Caracas in the continent and its lack of urban primacy within the country were basically due to Venezuela's weak incorporation within international trade circuits. That is why the capital of the coffee-and-cocoa exporter was doomed to remain a commercial and bureaucratic "outpost" for North Atlantic trade - a situation which would only change with the emergence of the oil economy in the 1920s (Roberts, 1978: 48; Rofman, 1977: 95-96; Lombardi, 1982).

6. Through the contrast with other capitals they had visited before, the chronicles of five voyagers to mid-nineteenth-century Caracas offer a vivid portrait of the modest capital of post-colonial Venezuela. Written in the urbane and arrogant style worthy of the well-travelled Brazilian Minister Miguel Maria (Consejero) Lisboa, the first chronicle was the relation of his sojourn in Caracas during the early 1850s, a chapter of a long journey through Venezuela, Nueva Granada and Ecuador. Peppared with the hilarity and the indulgent curiosity of a New Yorker arriving in the rustic Venezuelan

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<sup>1</sup> For the case of Caracas, Morse's figures - which are rather inflated - have been replaced by local sources; the gap between Caracas and other capitals therefore becomes even bigger. In this respect, it is worth remembering that demographic estimations for all this period are often uncertain and sources could even appear contradictory; nevertheless, my aim is only to give a comparative idea of the urban size.

capital, the second chronicle was published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1858, traditionally attributed to the American H. E. Sanford<sup>2</sup>. A more thoughtful and pessimistic analysis of the backward country and its capital was offered by the Hungarian Pal Rosti, a social reformer who travelled across North America and Cuba after studying photography in Paris in the late 1850s. The fourth drawing can be made from the impressions of Caracas included in Eastwick's *Venezuela or Sketches of Life in a South American Republic* (1868) - some of whose chapters had been previously published in Dickens's *All Year Round*; more than a mere financial assessment, the English Commissioner's report turned out to be a funny account of his anecdotes in the bankrupt republic. In the same year of 1868, the country was visited by the German explorer Friedrich Gerstäcker, whose benevolent report of Caracas was probably influenced by the warm welcome he received from his fellow countrymen during the Holy Week he stayed in the city.

Once he had surmounted the obstacles due to its inaccessible natural location, the first feature noticed by the American was the flat skyline of Caracas, only interrupted by the Cathedral tower in the Plaza Mayor, which the Englishman found barely "as big as Portman-square". Although Gerstäcker was surprised by the total extension of the city, its sparse *damero* (chessboard) and its unbroken profile of red-tiled roofs remained mostly untouched since colonial times; "the appearance of a brick-yard surrounded by a garden" immediately confirmed to visitors the traditional lack of importance of the former provincial capital of the Spanish Empire (Sandford, 1858: 188; Eastwick, 1868: 47; Gerstäcker, 1968: 21). Economic

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<sup>2</sup> Even though the name of the author does not appear in the magazine, Huizi Aguiar - former Commercial Adviser to the Venezuelan Embassy in USA and translator of the chronicle into Spanish - attributed the chronicle to Sanford in the last edition of the Spanish version (1962: 239).



backwardness and urban stagnation still characterized the republican capital: more than forty years on, the devastating effects of the 1812 earthquake were still noticeable in that "ciudad de los muertos", which the Hungarian and other travellers could contemplate with feelings of melancholy (Lisboa, 1954: 73; Rosti, 1968: 47-52). In view of so many natural and political calamities, the Commissioner - additionally disturbed by the noisy tolling of the Cathedral bells at daybreak - decided to satirize the dismal panorama for potential English visitors: "were it not for earthquakes, epidemic insect plagues, triennial revolutions, and bell ringing, there would be few more desirable localities for a residence" (Eastwick, 1868: 49, 54).

Besides those unfortunate impressions - which might be blamed on catastrophic circumstances - the overall mediocrity of Caraqueñan architecture was a more significant symptom of its urban obscurity. Looking through the lattice windows displayed for the Holy-Week processions, the German visitor could contemplate the Caraqueñans' decorative innovations in the Spanish patios and other areas of the one-storey houses, which predominated in the city (Gerstäcker, 1968: 27-28). But regarding public architecture, the rest of the chroniclers explicitly stated that none of the buildings called for special notice: vaguely reminding Rosti of the so-called "Jesuitical" style in Budapest, neither the façade nor the interior of the Cathedral had anything "worth noticing, except the tomb of Bolívar"; the Municipal Hall "externally is not only plain, but almost shabby", added Sandford. And, according to the disdainful Brazilian diplomat, the so-called Palacio de Gobierno was "una buena casa y nada más, sin ninguna pretensión arquitectónica exterior" - an impression confirmed by the American in relation to the so-called Palacio Arzobispal (Sandford, 1858:

191; Eastwick, 1868: 65; Lisboa, 1954: 68; Rosti, 1968: 60)<sup>3</sup>.

The lack of true palaces was accentuated by the poor urban infrastructure. Given the German visitor's low expectations for Caracas, he confessed to be astonished with the fact that the Venezuelan capital had gas lighting, which the Brazilian certainly found defective (Gerstäcker, 1968: 21; Lisboa, 1954: 71). Nevertheless, since he was coming straight from Olmsted's New York, the American visitor's puzzlement with the semi-rural conditions of the Caracas centre is understandable: "In going through the streets - which are laid out with some regularity - we are struck with their narrowness, their bad paving, the rarity of sidewalks, the entire absence of wheeled vehicles (with the exception of coffee-carts), and the low houses" (Sandford, 1858: 191). The roughness of the pavement was dramatically confirmed by the Londoner, who even suffered neck pain because his carriage was continually avoiding holes in the streets (Eastwick, 1868: 37). Not even coming across carriages or carts, the Hungarian bourgeois would later confess to his countrymen that Caracas had made him feel - for the first time in his journey across the Americas - how desperately far away from Europe and the civilized world he was (Rosti, 1968: 48).

7. Rosti's condemnation of the social life in Caracas apparently had much to do with his lack of contact with the best of Caraqueñan society - as he regretted at the end of the whole month he spent in the city. He was once invited to a ball in a noble house, where European dances such as polkas

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<sup>3</sup> The Spanish version has wrongly translated Sandford's slight reference to the Palacio Arzobispal as one of the central buildings as if it was a notorious exception (1962: 246). On the contrary, after the quick reference to the "archbishop's palace", Sandford actually added that "neither of these buildings call for any special notice" (1858: 191). This is a misinterpretation which I also adopted in a preliminary version of this text, before consulting the original English version (Almandoz, 1995: 11).

and waltzes were just as much in fashion as in Havana. Though another highlight of his visit were the Holy-Week processions of 1857, the Hungarian could thereafter conclude that the Caraquenians' main amusement was in attending church, as the Parisians' was in going to the boulevards. All in all:

"Caracas torna melancólico al extranjero que se ha acostumbrado al ruido constante de las grandes ciudades; un silencio mortal reina en la ciudad semiderruida, donde están ausentes el movimiento comercial e industrial y aun falta el ruido de los carruajes. No hay salas de fiesta ni teatros; ni siquiera paseos; vida social sólo puede hallarse en los círculos más íntimos" (Rosti, 1968: 63).

Not having reached these inner circles, however, the Hungarian was prevented from appreciating subtler urbanities which other visitors - better welcomed by Caraquenian oligarchs - were able to enjoy.

Despite its meagre scale and population - which some visitors overestimated as "50,000 souls", whilst it was in fact closer to the 40,000 reckoned by Rosti - the unpaved Caracas offered some traces of urban life and civilization. A considerable variety of shops with imported merchandise paraded along the Calle del Comercio, "the aristocratic street of the city" (Sandford, 1858: 189, 191; Rosti, 1868: 59); its appearance was not, however, comparable with European or even Brazilian high streets, according to the fastidious Lisboa:

"Las tiendas y comercios ocupan principalmente las calles de las Leyes Patrias y del Comercio, entre la Plaza de San Francisco y la de San Pablo. En ellas se encuentra gran profusión de almacenes y de quincallería inglesa, francesa, alemana y americana. Pero el lujo y aspecto están muy lejos de parecerse no sólo a los espléndidos almacenes de Londres y de París, sino incluso al de nuestras calles de Ouvidor y Quintada" (Lisboa, 1954: 68).

Such a variety of foreign commerce was due to the fact that Caracas was not only the sole Venezuelan city which could fulfil the urban standards required by European merchants, but it also mirrored the oligarchs' post-colonial obsession with French and English fashion, which certainly started to be included in the polite agenda of the petit salons. Unlike the women of Havana - who always wore mantilla and veil - prettier Caraquenian ladies preferred the imitation of French fashion, which the Hungarian reformer found to be not only of "bad taste" but also ill suited to their Hispanic beauty; in addition, the gentlemen's morning and dress coats, made in heavy European materials, were inappropriate for the tropical climate (1968: 64). More concerned with democratic aspects of clothing, the American commented on "the great uniformity as to costume, or rather want of it" for the general population of the city, whereas he found the ladies' costumes "a little exaggerated on European fashions, much bejewelled, belaced and ornamented" (1858: 188, 198). Though praising their natural comeliness, the puritan German also thought the Caraquenian beauties' daily display of make-up and train gowns during the Holy-Week processions was excessively pompous, especially considering the sadness he associated with the truly Christian commemoration (1968: 27). But the sophisticated Brazilian seemed rather pleased to report the Caraquenian elite's snobbish attitude towards fashion:

"En la capital, el traje de los elegantes no difiere de los de París y Londres, los jóvenes caraqueños son pintureros y caprichosos para vestir, y el tamaño de la cintura de un chaleco o el corte del borde de una casaca son cosas que se observan y se discuten. Las señoras, postergando quizá sin razón los estilos de Castilla y Andalucía, se alistan todas ellas bajo la poderosa bandera de *El pequeño correo de las damas*. Pero las modas parisienses no llegan a Caracas con la misma diligencia, prontitud y

regularidad con que llegan a Río, lo que da lugar a que algunas caraqueñas, utilizando las facilidades que les proporcionan sus activas correspondencias de París, que les inician con anticipación en los importantes arcanos de los *Baisiens* y de los *Constantins*, se anticipen y brillen sobre los demás" (Lisboa, 1954; 86).

The avidity for European fashion fuelled the emergence of trendy magazines such as *La Guirnalda*, devoted to Parisian *haute couture* and European literature in general. Interest in the latter also was manifest in the popularization of French, English and even German as main foreign languages, especially among the Caraquenian young who benefited from the relatively easy but still primitive "communication facilities" with Europe and the United States (Lisboa, 1954: 101; Gerstäcker, 1968: 22). Apart from the upper class's frequent travelling, those facilities relied upon the locally-celebrated version of the "telegraph", a frail telegraphic line linking Caracas with La Guaira; from the latter, the so-called "paquete" service (from the "packet" boat) would fortnightly take mail and passengers to Saint Thomas, the Danish possession in the Caribbean which served as international transference point. With such precarious means of communication with the outer world, it was very difficult for the ladies of Caracas to be so *à la mode* as Río's, where telegraphic lines had arrived by the early 1850s, as in Mexico, Cuba, Chile and Argentina (Sandford, 1858: 191; Rippey, 1941: 30).

Caraquenian ladies and gentlemen did their best, though, to keep in touch with the latest European fads and worldly trends in general - as if they tried to compensate, in the domestic domain, the sophistication lacking in the city. When invited to a dinner at his host's, Eastwick was certainly "surprised at the elegance of his ménage. His house was but one story high, but there were many fine rooms in it. The drawing room, for example, was about sixty

feet long and twenty-five broad, and furnished like a first-class saloon in Paris." (1868: 38). In addition to its décor, the salon was probably conducted according to the rituals prescribed in the various etiquette manuals of oligarchic Caracas, such as Feliciano Montenegro Colón's *Lecciones de Buena Crianza, Moral y Mundo* (1841) and Manuel Antonio Carreño's *Manual de Urbanidad y Buenas Maneras* (1853), among others. The Creole tracts were inspired by French and English writers on morality and etiquette, such as Charles Pineau Duclos, Elisabeth Félicie Celnart, Alfred Guillaume Comte d'Orsay and Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield.

Despite the economic, demographic and physical constraints of a capital which made the Hungarian feel far away from civilization, the German declared that learned Venezuelan families were culturally closer to Europe than in any other South-American country. The European ethos of the mid-nineteenth-century capital was to be confirmed by the Spanish visitor in the years to come (Güell y Mercader, 1883: 207; Gerstäcker, 1968: 22). However, when meeting at their European-like salons, Caraquenian oligarchs probably longed for an urban setting worthy of their private refinement - as the Brazilian seemed to realize, quite perspicaciously. The major urban conflict of post-colonial Caracas probably lay here: it was a capital with some salons but no palaces.

"era un César, aristócrata y letrado, lleno de refinamientos y de genio"

José María Vargas Vila, *Los Césares de la Decadencia* (1913)

## THE ILLUSTRIOUS PROJECT

8. The urban conflict of the post-colonial capital was to be tackled by a young man who had probably listened to the Caraquenian socialites' longings, when invited to their splendid salons, as he frequently was. As soon as he became Venezuelan president, Antonio Guzmán Blanco (1829-1899) was to launch one of the most ambitious projects of modernization conceived across Latin America, involving an urban dream far beyond the actual possibilities of the tiny capital. Throughout his three presidential periods - "Septenio" (1870-77), "Quinquenio" (1879-84) and "Aclamación" or "Bienio" (1886-88), including two short entr'actes in Europe - Guzmán Blanco also enacted the longest and most-intriguing drama of Venezuelan political history during the nineteenth century: the "Guzmanato". Defined by the *Encyclopædia Britannica* as the "typical Latin American caudillo (military chieftain) of his era", Guzmán can be regarded as such inasmuch as he was another "receiver of the bankrupt colonial regime of Latin America"; nevertheless, none of the Venezuelan and few of the continental caudillos possessed his "balance" of diverse attributes, which made him a Caesar "lleno de refinamientos y de genio" (Vargas Vila, 1913: 183; Wise, 1951: x, 81). Let us therefore glance at Guzmán's personal traits, in order to understand the project he conceived for his city and his country.

Having studied in the prestigious school run by Montenegro Colón - the author of one of the etiquette manuals - Guzmán's first peculiarity was his natural distinction and social breeding, immediately noticed by those who

knew him personally. The Colombian exile in Venezuela, Alirio Díaz Guerra - who met him in the Aclamación years - portrayed a Guzmán whose Hispanic nobility apparently grew with the age:

"Guzmán Blanco poseía porte elegante, aristocrático, erecto; sus facciones, de perfil clásico, revelaban estirpe noble; entre las multitudes sobresalía por su talla y por su aspecto dominador y soberbio. En la época en que lo conocí, ya su edad era avanzada, mas, a despecho de ello, no perdía la solemnidad que le daba su figura y que completaba la blancura de su cabello y de su barba. Imposible negar que exhibía los rasgos de un antiguo caballero feudal" (Díaz Guerra, 1933: 95).

His distinction was complemented by good manners, a rare combination among artless Venezuelan rulers, as had to be recognized by the well-bred and half-American Thomas Russell Ybarra - whose father had become one of Guzmán's bitterest enemies:

"Unlike former Venezuelan dictators, Antonio Guzmán Blanco was unique in Venezuelan history. Other dictators in Venezuela have been uncouth men of little education and less social standing, who forced their way to the front because they had in them the raw material of leadership. Páez, the Centaur, Bolívar's fantastic lieutenant of the war of independence, was of this brand; and Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez's uncouthness stuck out all over them; they showed almost nothing of those traits that the world associates with a Spanish heritage - elegance and distinction and good manners.

"But Guzmán Blanco had all of these. He was strikingly handsome. He had natural breeding. He carried himself like a conqueror. He was of good family. He was a man of education - in the limited sense in which that term was understood in the Venezuela of his epoch." (Ybarra, 1943: 188).

There were also the advantages of a rich urban itinerary which the cosmopolitan Guzmán Blanco displayed throughout his life. Before



becoming president in the 1870s, he had already been a diplomat and negotiator of loans and agreements for the Venezuelan government, both in the United States and Europe. First during the late 1850s, he was appointed Venezuelan consul in Philadelphia and New York, which certainly impressed him a great deal. In the 1860s, he spent several-months' sojourns in London, Madrid and Paris; in the latter he had time to enjoy the cultural extravaganza of the Second Empire, from Jacques Offenbach's operettas to the newly-published Larousse *Grand Dictionnaire*, which he would later have in his private library. Lastly, during and in between his presidencies, Guzmán and his family passed golden interregna in Washington, London and Paris, where he finally stayed until his death in 1899 (Rojas, 1972: 21; Polanco, 1992: 105-7, 204). This vast international experience apparently was a rare quality for a Latin American president at that time, as was noticed by the English traveller James Mudie Spence during his visit to the Septenio Caracas:

"The President's travels in various parts of Europe, and especially his residence in England, France and the United States, had afforded him opportunities of examining and becoming acquainted with the latest results of civilization; and, to a person of his naturally acute perceptions, it must have shown the advantage, nay, the absolute necessity, of stable government for the development of a country's resources." (Spence, 1878, I: 106-7).

Besides making him acquainted with the benefits of modern civilization for the development of Venezuela, Guzmán's long journeys to Europe, and especially to Paris, accustomed him and his family to the delights of domestic refinement and social splendour. Their addiction to *la vie parisienne* was already conspicuous in the young president's household, whose cooks, hairdressers and clothes, by the early 1870s, had to be

imported from Paris (Polanco, 1992: 367-68). By the Aclamación, not only were most of Mrs Guzmán Blanco's dresses ordered "by Worth" from the French capital "each spring and fall", but also Caraquenian ladies were invited to her house to look them over. Mrs Guzmán Blanco's snobbery was not seen by the American traveller William Eleroy Curtis in any other capital of Spanish America:

"In a room adjoining the chamber are a number of large glass-cases, like those in a modiste's shop, in which her treasures are always hang; and whenever a reception is given by the dictator this wardrobe is open to the visitors - a new and novel idea, but one which gives the ladies of Venezuela a great pleasure" (Curtis, 1888: 284).

But Ana Teresa's whims merely mirrored her husband's: even on the battlefield, the alleged caudillo could be ecstatic over the reception of immaculate pears from Paris, or concerned because of the death of one of the Parisian horses imported for his coach in Caracas (30-X-1874, 19-III-1879, Castellanos, 1969: 333, 425)<sup>4</sup>. In terms of domestic decoration, though, the Guzmáns' Frenchified manias apparently produced unhappy results - at least according to the American's plainer taste. Their private residence was lavishly upholstered and decorated with works done by Parisian artists, "but there is such a vivid brilliancy in the frescoing, in the fabrics, and the furniture that one wishes these tropical people who had so much money had a little more refinement of taste" (Curtis, 1888: 290).

But Guzmán Blanco's mansions in Caracas and Paris stored more than extravagant stuff. His private libraries mirrored a heterodox and vast agenda of reading: travel guides of European and American cities, engineering and

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<sup>4</sup> Guzmán's private letters to his wife will be referenced by the date and the page in Castellanos's compilation (1969).

architecture treatises - to be commented on later - and biographies of Napoleon I were obviously some stations of his intellectual itinerary (*Inventario...*, 1892). The biographies not only confirmed Guzmán's admiration for the French emperor but also his legendary ambition, allegedly inspired by the Napoleonic model. Beyond the first emperor's historical presence in Guzmán's libraries, Napoleon III's influence on the Venezuelan president apparently had a more historic base, given the latter's successive visits to Second-Empire Paris, as well as his eldest daughter's later marriage with a son of the Duke of Morny - Napoleon III's illegitimate brother and adviser. Besides his "perilla y bigote a lo Napoleón III", Guzmán Blanco's political imitation of the later French emperor tends to be seen traditionally in terms of the former's hypertrophied ego; but that imitation cannot be extended to Napoleon III's inclination to socialism, especially considering that the Frenchman had fallen into political disgrace by the Guzmanato years (Díaz Sánchez, 1950: 590-91; Gil Fortoul, 1953-54, III: 136; Coll, 1980: 401; Polanco, 1992: 566-68). Nevertheless, Guzmán's emulation of Napoleon III fuelled the question about the Second-Empire ethos of Guzmanian Caracas - to be discussed later on.

Everything considered, Guzmán Blanco stands as one of the most polemic figures in Venezuelan history, still facing a complex trial which has hitherto been summarized from two basic perspectives. On the one hand, the "gran estafador" has often been labelled as a snobbish cosmopolitan who repressed his Venezuelan self and cherished the project of living in Europe as a "sueño dorado" - as he confessed intimately in some letters to Ana Teresa (3-IX-1870, 14-IX-1879, Castellanos, 1969: 13, 176, 454; Marsland, 1954: 189-210). The *rastaquouère* not only preferred life in Paris to Caracas, but also disdained his countrymen's folk expressions abroad,

though he privately craved for Creole dishes during his Parisian seasons (Rondón, 1952: 5, 13; Díaz Sánchez, 1950: 590-91; Coll, 1980: 402). On the other hand, the alleged caudillo managed to accumulate an international culture which made him Venezuela's most versatile leader till the 1950s. With the exception of Bolívar, he was the first Venezuelan president to conjure and balance both the archaic and the modern forces which informed the nineteenth-century republic. The Venezuelan Caesar was thus a result of the Caraquenian elite's unavoidable schizophrenia - torn between urban sophistication and rural ruthlessness (Armas, 1967, I: 206; Lombardi, 1982: 161, 190-91; Boulton, 1994)<sup>5</sup>. Although his trials as either dictator or president have not yet been concluded, it is still true that the "Ilustre Americano" - a title he was given by the national Congress in 1873 - made possible the sole illustrious autocracy of Venezuelan history.

9. The first time Guzmán Blanco addressed the Venezuelan congress after his rise to power in 1870, he summarized the previous three decades of radical opposition between oligarchs and liberals in the following terms:

"Dividida Venezuela desde 1840 en dos partidos, el uno pugnando por la libertad, el otro armado con la autoridad; este heredero de la colonia, aquel hijo de la república; el primero que marcha al porvenir, el segundo que se aferra al pasado; entre el oligarca y el liberal ha existido siempre una distancia que no han podido acercar ni el tiempo ni sus lecciones, ni el prestigio de la mayoría popular, ni sus triunfos materiales, ni sus conquistas morales ni su magnanimidad, en fin" (Guzmán Blanco, 1876: 6).

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<sup>5</sup> Don Alfredo Boulton, Letter to author (September 7): "Guzmán Blanco fue nuestro primer presidente en poseer una cierta cultura internacional, por cuya razón fue quien inició la modificación de Caracas ... El mote de 'afrancesado' que algunos ignorantes, despectivamente, le han dado, sirve no tanto para calificar a Guzmán Blanco sino para juzgar la capacidad intelectual de esas gentes."

By so speaking, the new president officially invested his liberal cause with the values of freedom, republicanism and progressivism - widespread slogans of the other liberal parties in Latin America throughout the nineteenth century. But Guzmán's presidential project was to bring about a readjustment of the priorities and values of traditional liberalism in Venezuela. If the political consolidation of the unsettled republic had had a major importance for his predecessors, the caudillo regarded it as a mere prerequisite of more positive aims, such as progress and civilization. Peace was thereby supposed to be the "punto de partida de todo progreso", according to a formula the president repeatedly stressed to the Venezuelan congressmen, when resources targeted for building roads and schools or encouraging immigration had frequently to be diverted to appease domestic conflicts in the volatile republic (1876: 29; 1880: 7). Once political order was relatively attained, vigorous Progress and fecund Civilization made possible the civic achievements of Guzmán's liberalism: the establishment of the former "sobre las ruinas de la Libertad", and the transformation of the "semi-wild" country into a nation of citizens (Aristiguieta, 1879: 16; Vargas Vila, 1913: 184, 187).

By the end of the Quinquenio, Venezuela's new era of progressive liberalism was already recognized from a continental perspective. Not only did the traveller from prosperous Argentina salute General Guzmán's material achievements (Cané, 1942: 11), but also the visitor from post-secessionist America celebrated his opportune social reforms. As Juárez had done in Mexico, Guzmán adopted "radical and excessive measures" to overthrow the Church's former "tyranny" in oligarchic Venezuela, after a long-lasting enmity triggered by the Archbishop's refusal to celebrate the caudillo's military victories with a *Te Deum* at the Cathedral of Caracas. At the same time, the

1870 decree on compulsory primary education entitled lower social strata to benefit from the numerous schools "supported by the Federal Government", which brought about a cultural revolution among former slaves. As the American visitor noticed in a Lincolnesque manner:

"The negroes are particularly eager to learn and the average attendance of the blacks is very much greater than that of white children, and out of proportion of the population. The ratio of illiteracy is greater among the whites than among the negroes, and people are beginning to complain that servants are being spoiled by education" (Curtis, 1888: 271).

Besides social reforms, Curtis highlighted the financial recovery of the previously bankrupt republic: "the credit of the Government has been improved, its debts reduced, and the interest to its creditors is for the first time in history paid promptly, in full and in advance". In view of all of those achievements, the American seemed to dismiss the social outcry that Guzmán's absolutism had turned him into "the uncrowned king of Venezuela, the man whose authority is more absolute in this republic than is that of any king of Europe in his own dominions" (Curtis, 1888: 286-87).

Before Guzmán, conservative oligarchs - or "godos" - had merely been concerned about the political consolidation of the unsettled republic, and the way it was perceived abroad, especially in the "English mirror". While boosting Venezuela's position as a peripheral yet more successful exporter for the North Atlantic bloc, Guzmán's progressive liberalism was instead conceived not only in terms of political evolution but also in terms of material achievements (Lombardi, 1982: 191; Urbaneja, 1988: 24-26, 98-104). An early example of this philosophical transition in Latin America, Guzmán's materialism also represented the end of idealistic Encyclopedism and the

entrance into a new era of Positivism, used by the "liberal Caesar" to dress his emerging liberalism as a science. Championed by the German-born scientist Adolf Ernst and Venezuelan doctor Rafael Villavicencio - who heralded Comte's, Darwin's and Spencer's theories in the Guzmanian milieu - the new creole science provided epistemological support for the caudillo's "liberalismo antiteológico" (Luna, 1971: 32-48; Picón Salas, 1975: 14; 1984: 121). In the end, despite the unresolved debate about the alleged tyrant's autocratic style, the Guzmanato turned out to be a landmark of progressive liberalism in Venezuela and Latin America.

10. Guzmán Blanco's progressivism had understandably been shaped according to the examples of the countries which he had been more in touch with during his diplomatic life. Britain, the United States and France featured in Guzmán's national project with different yet complementary meanings. First, there was the secular admiration for mighty Britain, summarized in Guzmán's greeting to the English visitor Spence in the early 1870s:

"The history of nations showed a succession of epochs in which they advance from fishing and hunting to pastoral life and then to agriculture, but the crowning glory of civilization is the epoch of manufactures. 'Venezuela', said he, addressing himself to me, 'is now in the agricultural period, but I hope that we will soon enter upon the industrial era, the stage at which your country has long ago arrived. I trust that we may imitate those arts of peace and public virtues, which have made England great and famous.'" (Spence, 1878, II: 143-44).

The liberal president's salute to English political and economic supremacy thus mirrored the Britons' twofold significance in Latin America - as it was perceived by Mulhall in the same years. On the one hand, England was the

Old-World master in the "arts of peace and public virtues", according to its political prestige for the Venezuelan elite. On the other hand - perhaps with more intimate admiration - Guzmán contemplated the industrial prowess of the "leading merchants" as a paradigm of progressive civilization (Mulhall, 1878: 600; Stein, 1970: 176).

Despite his rhetorical plea to emulate the political and economic prowess of England, the president probably realized that it would take a long time for his "agricultural" republic to attain the industrial threshold opened by British manufacture. In view of this gap, the Guzmán of the Septenio preferred to call upon the United States as the best example of the true possibilities of development of the Americas. Trying to convey to his congressmen in 1873 the idea that his modernizing daydream was possible, Guzmán declared that Venezuela should become, in the continental perspective and within the following four or five decades, what the United States had represented for the world during the former forty years: the ideal of peace, freedom, order and progress which had astonished sibling Latin republics and elder European states (1876: 30, 45). Though culturally minor, perhaps, yet economically successful, the big sister of the New World republics was a handier paragon for the preindustrial Venezuela of the Septenio.

France was the nation which ultimately combined the advantages of both material progress and civilization for the Guzmán of the Quinquenio. Having lived in Paris for nearly two years after the Septenio, the reelected president had decided to turn Venezuela into "the France of South America". In an 1879 letter to the editor of the French newspaper *La Liberté* - intended to make clear the pacific means by which he was being summoned to power again - Guzmán spelt out his Frenchified intentions:



"Al partir para regresar a mi patria, que he gobernado, no sin algún brillo, durante largos años, no deseo más que una sola cosa, bajo el punto de vista exterior, y es que la Francia aproveche de mis simpatías personales para estrechar los lazos que unen a estos dos alejados pueblos.

"El espíritu de la Francia contemporánea y la cordura de su gobierno actual, me inspiran el deseo y la esperanza de confundir los intereses y las tendencias de las dos naciones.

"Desearía que los principales artículos de exportación de Venezuela, como el café, el cacao, el añil y el algodón, tuviesen a la Francia como mercado central, mientras que los vinos y los otros productos agrícolas franceses, disfrutarían en nuestro país de una libre franquicia de derechos. Desearía también importar a mi país la ciencia, la literatura, las artes y la industria francesas, por medio de una gran corriente de inmigración. En una palabra, aspiro a hacer de Venezuela la Francia de la América del Sur." (Guzmán Blanco, 1879: 61-62).

Nevertheless, post-imperial France never achieved the importance which Britain and the United States did for the Venezuelan economy during the rest of the century. At least in terms of volume of trade and investments, both countries led alternatively from the 1860s onwards, according to contemporary figures. Nor could France compete in terms of manufactured goods with British supremacy throughout the nineteenth century - a supremacy sometimes challenged but never seriously threatened by the United States and Germany (Tejera, 1875, I: 328-29; Landaeta, 1889, II: 201; Carl, 1980: 127-40). But economic secondariness was more than compensated for by cultural predominance: pampered by Guzmán's conspicuous Frenchification, France increasingly governed the cultural ethos of the young republic, which never came to be known as "the" France of South America, however. With the natural addition of the North American ingredient, which represented the success of the Europeanization in the

New World, the binomial dependence on Anglo-French Europe thus framed Guzmán Blanco's illustrious project - a typical example of the Latin American positivists' rejection of the Spanish heritage in their search for material progress (Galey, 1973: 110; Bradford, 1979: 16-17).

"Tausend fleiß'ge Hände regen  
Helfen sich in munterm Bund,  
Und in feurigem Bewegen  
Werden alle Kräfte fund."

Friedrich Schiller, "Das Lied von der Glocke" 6

## A FIESTA OF PROGRESS AND CIVILIZATION

11. The progressive principles of Guzmán's illustrious project had to be converted into administrative targets. In a message delivered to his congressmen in 1874, popular education, immigration and means of communication were envisaged by the Venezuelan president as the three prerequisites for any country to settle down and to aspire to a worthy future (1876: 823). Besides the aforementioned improvement in public education, immigration and railways rapidly became the major targets of the Guzmanian administration. Though their effects on the national level are beyond the urban scope of this study, let us glance at the way those targets contributed to the shaping of the Caraquenian scene.

When depicting the social composition of the pre-Guzmanian capital, Lisboa had noticed how "Contribuye algo al aumento de Caracas la frecuente

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6 "...mil brazos en alegre alianza /reconcentran su fuerza y ardimiento, / y a un punto dirigida su pujanza / cobra la industria raudo movimiento", F. S., "Canción de la Campana", trans. D. J. E. Hartzénbuch (Ernst, 1983, III: 27).

entrada de colonos de las islas Canarias, de alemanes que han venido últimamente en gran número y que han caído muy bien, y de irlandeses, que, por el contrario, no han agradado ni prosperado" (1954: 77-78). Estimated by Sandford at twenty thousand in the whole country, the Canary Islanders or *Isleños* certainly amounted to the most abundant European group in Caracas; they were so rooted in the city that they even had religious fiestas devoted to their own patron saints, whose uproar disturbed Eastwick's dream, as we remember (Eastwick, 1868: 40). But the *Isleños* did not represent an entrepreneurial acquisition for the country, since they tended to assume a great deal of the hard work abandoned by former slaves - released by president José Gregorio Monagas in 1854. However, "seconding the Anglo-Saxon" element, *Isleños* were trusted by the American visitor as the sole hope of "the superior race" in the stagnated country, where the indigenous and African races were "rapidly swallowing up the Europeans" (Sandford, 1858: 193-94). Instead, Germans represented a more realistic hope for the superior races in the country of mestizos. Working as distinguished traders - like the Blohms - craftsmen and apothecaries, Gerstäcker found in Caracas more of his countrymen than he had expected; he was nonetheless surprised at not coming across any German doctor (1968: 22-23).

Despite the visitors' impressions, Venezuela did not parallel the cases of economically expanding countries like Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, where European immigrants amounted to up to 50% of their urban populations during the second half of the nineteenth century (Hardoy, 1975: 56-57). Nevertheless, the few incomers were moderately boosted by the Guzmanian policy of immigration: whilst not trying to be pushy on the foreigner but expecting, rather, to attract his confidence in the country during the Septenio,

the president decreed sponsoring Juntas de Inmigración during the Quinquenio (Guzmán Blanco, 1876: 823; Decree 2276, 18-I-1881, *Recopilación*, 1884, IX: 184)<sup>7</sup>. By including a grant for their journey and a subsidy for the newcomers till they found a job, the Guzmanato boosted a celebrated shift in Venezuela's traditional lack of concern for immigration. In contrast with the 12,610 foreigners who arrived in the oligarchic republic between 1832 and 1857, during the Guzmanato there arrived in the country more than 26,000 new settlers. Nevertheless, 37,000 Europeans - most of them Spaniards - still represented a very low proportion among the 2 million Venezuelans of the Quinquenio (Tejera, 1875, I: 359; *Segundo Censo*, 1881; Vandellós, 1938: 38).

Although oriented towards supporting agriculture more than urban industry, Guzmán's immigration policy started to have effects on the variety of the Caracas population by the early 1870s. There were 3,699 Europeans among the 60,010 total population of the Distrito Federal (DF) - which certainly remained stagnated during the following decade - whereas there occurred an increase of 2,553 new foreigners by 1881. The figures for the European residents in Caracas were headed by Spaniards, followed by Frenchmen, Germans, Italians, Dutch, Britons, Danes and others; all of them together exceeded by far the proportion of both North or Latin American residents (*Primer Censo*, 1873: 77, 80; *Segundo Censo*, 1881, II: 96).

The tiny capital apparently welcomed the sparse but industrious colonies of Britons and Germans. Apart from a Roman Catholic cemetery "said to be the finest in South America", the ecumenical Caracas sheltered a "Cementerio

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<sup>7</sup> For most of Guzmanian decrees, references will include: the number and date (day, month, year) of issue of the decree, the year of edition and the volume of the *Recopilación*, and finally the page where the decree can be found.

de los Ingleses", started by Robert Ker Porter - the British consul in the 1830s. There also was a so-called "Cementerio de los Alemanes", where in fact Protestants and Jews were buried. Though they were traditionally planted with cypresses which would give a touch of exotic romanticism to the tropical skyline, the British Commissioner found the foreigners' graveyards rather neglected and weed-covered (Eastwick, 1868: 51-52; Nazoa, 1977: 88). Even so, the British Minister at Caracas, R. T. Middleton, wanted to end his days in the "eternal spring" of that city which was "a step to Paradise" - a desire he confided to Curtis at the end of a diplomatic career which had taken him to Paris, Madrid, Mexico City, Buenos Aires and Brazil (Curtis, 1888: 265).

Mr Middleton's official reports recognized, however, that his countrymen were not well represented in the cultural geography of the Guzmanian country, where Germans were taking the commercial lead.

"At present it may be said that there is no English community in Caracas or anywhere else in Venezuela; nor is there any Protestant church, or any library or hospital except those of the country. The Club here is entirely composed of Germans, who have also clubs at La Guayra, Puerto Cabello, Maracaybo and Ciudad Bolivar. In recent times no British subjects can be termed 'leading merchants' except Mr. H. L. Boulton of this city, whose business, however, is entirely with the United States" (Mulhall, 1878: 560-61).

Unlike the 164 rather stiff Britons living in the DF by 1873, the 414 Germans apparently were not only more numerous but also better adapted to Venezuelan society, as happened in the rest of Latin America. Many of Gerstäcker's hosts had married Creole ladies and fathered beautiful offspring, who still treasured their German roots - in contrast with the

descendants of Germans in North America, who rejected their "Dutchman" ancestors (Gerstäcker, 1968: 22).

The relative disadvantage of the Britons in Caracas was certainly due to the fact that their enclave was never comparable with those in other Latin American capitals, which did not prevent the "leading merchants" from acquiring financial and commercial privileges in Venezuela. As a result of Guzmán's performance as fiscal agent of the Venezuelan government in the British capital, in 1865 there was founded the Banco de Londres y Venezuela, Ltd., aimed at encouraging the trade between the two nations. In addition, Englishmen and Germans apparently "monopolized" Guzmanian concessions up to the Quinquenio, when Curtis noticed that the government was "anxious to secure the investment of American capital in public enterprises". The foreign trio was thereafter responsible for most of the industrial progress of the tropical republic, since natives - despite their natural abilities for business - were always "satisfied to run along in the same old rut their great-grandfathers made until some Yankee or German or Englishman introduces a modern improvement." (Curtis, 1896: 44-45; Carl, 1980: 63).

12. Since George Stephenson's son had visited Venezuela in 1824 and devised a proposal to establish a railway line between Caracas and La Guaira - only precariously linked by road through the mountains since colonial times - the railways debate had become a regular issue on the agenda of following administrations. Further proposals were devised by foreign engineers like the Briton John Hawkshaw or the Pole Alberto Lutowski, among countless attempts frustrated by financial hindrances. By

the late 1860s, Gerstäcker only found a few carriages abandoned (1968: 26), an impression confirmed by Eastwick's visit to the so-called "Eastern Railway Station":

"I found that the rails had been laid down for about half a mile, but the grass and weeds were growing over them. There were engines and carriages, and piles of wood for sleepers, sad emblems of the slumbers into which the whole concern has fallen, and from which it seems doubtful whether it will ever awake" (Eastwick, 1868: 48).

Public concern was awoken by the progressive Guzmán, but British and French-financed proposals made during the Septenio brought about furious rows among his short-sighted opponents. When the late Caracas-La Guaira railroad proposal was bitterly attacked during his Parisian exile, Guzmán's retort to his enemies summarized his vision of railways as an urgent necessity for Venezuelan progress:

"¡Desgraciada Venezuela! ¡Hace 52 años que Stevenson, el del Puente Britannia, estuvo en Carácas, y propuso hacer el ferrocarril entre Caracas y La Guaira, y no se llevó á efecto la obra que desde entonces habría puesto á Venezuela en esas corrientes alisias del nuevo progreso del mundo, izque por ser también oneroso el contrato y y también darle a Stevenson una enorme ganancia! ¡Espíritus estrechos y sin presciencia del porvenir, cómo sacrificáis la Patria y los destinos de tantas generaciones!" (Guzmán Blanco, 1878: 14).

The *Ilustre Americano* was right in blaming his critics for the backwardness of his country in relation to the paramount device of the industrial era: railways actually arrived in Venezuela much later than in the rest of Latin America, where they had been expedited in the progressive agendas of liberal governments (Rippy, 1944; González Deluca, 1991: 186). The

impulse to the development of Venezuelan railways from the Quinquenio compensated for their delay. Between 1880 and 1888 the Guzmanian administration signed 29 contracts for building 5,000 kms of railroads, though only 8 of these contracts would be finally completed towards the end of the century. Guzmán launched most of the network around Caracas, starting with the northerly Caracas-La Guaira line (1883), built by American technicians and with British capital. Thereafter followed successive lines which linked the capital to nearby villages in different directions: southwards, Caracas-El Valle (1883); southwest, Caracas-Antímano (1883); eastwards, Caracas-Petare (1886). The year after it was launched, Curtis confirmed that the Caracas-La Guaira railway was "justly considered one of the most remarkable examples of engineering and construction in the entire world", on the whole superior to the Oroya road of Peru, the Arequipa line of Bolivia and the tracks in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado (1896: 38)

Another issue noticed by the traveller was the "considerable mystery about Guzmán Blanco's connection with the corporation" which built the \$6-million link between Caracas and La Guaira. "At one time he was understood to have owned at least one-half of the bonds and a majority of the shares, and he destroyed the old wagon-road so as to compel people to travel and send their freight by rail" (Curtis, 1896: 43). Not only in the case of the Caracas-La Guaira line, Guzmán's railways in general were criticized for mirroring his personal interests - which allegedly involved profitable deals with his son-in-law, Auguste de Morny - whilst reinforcing neo-colonial bonds with British, French and German capital. Despite the long-term problems due to the differences of rail gauge, the ambitious programme underpinned the expansion of Venezuelan railways during the following decade, after the boom of road-building during the 1870s. With the embryonic but widespread



stretches linking the main cities and production centres to their respective ports, the export economy was provided with a regionally-articulated infrastructure which had previously been lacking. At the same time, Venezuelan territory was embraced administratively as a whole, and the idea of national and regional planning was thereby anticipated (Arcila Farías, 1961, II: 178; Hurtado, 1990: 339).

13. Having been in Europe during the 1860s, Guzmán Blanco could surely witness the increasing importance of world exhibitions as festivals where industrializing countries exhibited and exchanged the achievements of their progressive modernity. Venezuela was then represented in the World Exhibitions of London (1862) and Paris (1867), followed by the Guzmanian administration's endeavours to sponsor the attendance at the International Exhibitions of Vienna (1873), Bremen (1874), Santiago (1875), Philadelphia (1876), Paris (1878), Buenos Aires (1881) and Amsterdam (1882). The latter served as a model for the first 1883 Exposición Nacional, devoted to commemorating the first centenary of Bolívar's birthday - a marvellous coincidence that history offered Guzmán to re-create in Caracas the progressive ethos in an exhibition. According to the report made by Adolf Ernst - head of the organization committee by official decree (3-IX-1881) - the Exposición Nacional was meant to convey "una idea lo más exacta posible del estado actual de Venezuela y de su adelanto progresivo en sus distintas épocas desde el siglo pasado hasta la fecha", highlighting of course the proofs of the "sorprendente progreso que caracteriza las épocas presidenciales del General Guzmán Blanco" (Ernst, 1983, III: 7-8). Though intending chiefly to display the produce of each Venezuelan region, the Exposición, significantly, also included the foreign countries which inspired

Guzmán's illustrious project, namely Britain, the United States, France and Switzerland - whose federal constitution was promoted as a model during the Quinquenio. The exhibition thus appeared as an international event without precedent in Venezuelan history.

After two years of preparations, whose dynamism reminded Ernst of the industriousness celebrated in Schiller's "Das Lied von der Glocke", the *Exposición* was officially launched on August the 2nd, 1883, in a Palace illuminated by electric lights which kept shining for the following fifteen nights after the inauguration. The Weston electrification of the Palacio de la *Exposición* also included the Calle del Comercio, the Capitolio Boulevards and the new Guzmán Blanco Theatre - which at that time was presenting Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. The entrance of Caracas into the age of electricity paralleled the introduction of this device into the main capitals of Latin America (Rippy, 1944: 208-209; Salas, 1974: 46; Ernst, 1983, III: 27). In the rest of the city, the defective kerosene lanterns criticized by Lisboa had progressively been replaced by gas-lights since the 1870s, through successive contracts with Sebastián Viale Rigo, Henry Lord Boulton and Enrique Valiente, who were asked by the government to reproduce the "exact" intensity and standards of Paris and New York public lighting (GDF, *Memoria*, 1884: 27-28; López de Ceballos, 1953: 401; Lisboa, 1954: 71).

Water services had also made progress in the capital. In lieu of the colonial stone trenches working by gravity, the new iron aqueducts of Caracas were based on European technology working by pressure. Led by Venezuelan engineer and architect Luciano Urdaneta - who had studied in the Parisian Central School of Bridges and Roads - the replacement started in 1874 with the opening of the 46-km-long Guzmán Blanco aqueduct, one of the major

works of the Septenio (Arcila Farías, 1961, II: 359-60). The government then stressed control over water-supply licenses to particular houses, whose traditional distribution was modified by the new aqueducts and the importation of water-closets, introduced by Guzmán after one of his journeys to France (Decrees 17-VI-1872, 3-VIII-1876, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 174-81; Pardo Stolk, 1969). Urban water-supply was also improved by the creation and maintenance of public fountains all over the city (Decree 23, 27-V-1879, GDF, *Decretos Orgánicos*, 1879).

Fuelled by busy immigration, the economy of the festive capital also boomed. The traditionally civic and religious functions of the centre of post-colonial Caracas were enriched by its new role as a commercial district, epitomized in the reinforcement of the north-south oriented Calle del Comercio as the main high street of the city. With the *Salon Parisien*, the *Au Palais Royal* jewellers, the *Paris* hairdressers, the *Camisería Inglesa* and the stationary from *Albarracín* - which offered home-delivered cards "como si la hubiesen elaborado en París o Londres" - Guzmanian Caracas thereafter boasted European-like shops and services that enhanced the commercial variety already noticed by Sandford and Lisboa (Castellanos, 1983, I: 63-67; Morales and others, 1990: 105; Galey, 1973: 81-82). As the same time as in other major capitals of the continent, in 1883 the telephone was installed by international companies in the most exclusive shops and houses of Caracas, where the new device was soon more in use "than in any city of similar size in the United States", according to Curtis (1896: 45; Rippey, 1944: 182).

The 1883 Exposición Nacional thus became the apotheosis of Guzmanian progressivism. The advances of the different Venezuelan regions were exhibited according to the modest means of a country which strove to gain

admittance to the industrial era, paralleling the most advanced societies of Latin America. With its ephemeral show of electricity, aqueducts and telephones, the Caracas of the Exposición could enjoy, at least for a fortnight, the frenzy of the nineteenth-century world capitals. The Palacio de la Exposición thereupon stood not only as a reminder of the progressive fiesta, but also as another proof that Guzmanian Caracas was no longer a capital without palaces.

14. According to a note which appeared in the official newspaper *La Opinión Nacional*, when toasting with his hosts for the splendid ball he was offered at the close of the Exposición, Guzmán Blanco boasted: "Sólo en otra ciudad del mundo podrá darse un baile como éste: esa ciudad es Versálles"<sup>8</sup>. Although the boast could have been more appropriate in his country house of Antfmano - a Versailles-like refuge in the outskirts of Caracas - Guzmán's speech was still very *apropos*. If the ball celebrated the accomplishment of the progressive exhibition, on that night he rather relished the consummation of another prowess: the regal splendour achieved by a capital which had craved for civilization till the eve of his reign, when France was proclaimed the modern heiress of Europe's classical culture and refinement.

In the same year as that boast, Ramón de la Plaza's *Ensayos sobre el arte en Venezuela* - a sort of manifesto of Guzmanian aesthetics - proclaimed that Louis XIV's Paris was the new Athens of modernity and the centre of another Renaissance of civilization. Pointing at the era of Louis XIV as the generative age of modern French classicism, whose last expression certainly was Second-Empire grandeur, the Venezuelan art historian thus

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<sup>8</sup> *La Opinión Nacional*, 16-VIII-1883

enthroned in the rococo palace-city the ideals of refinement, politeness and absolutism of the Guzmanian court (Plaza, 1883: 7, 180). Even though the president's classicism sponsored his artists to live in Rome, "cuna del arte" - in lieu of the tempting but dissipative Paris - most of them were enraptured by the Beaux-Arts capital, as the president himself was. From Martín Tovar y Tovar's *atelier*, rue Montaigne, the *Ilustre Americano* ordered a great many epic portraits of Venezuelan heroes, elaborated in an academic style which represented a shift from the sober post-colonial tradition (Boulton, 1968, II: 166; Esteva-Grillet, 1986: 125; Meneses, 1995: 123-24).

The visitors to the Exposición also seemed to confirm that the Frenchified civilization of Caracas gave occasion for Guzmán's boast. The Colombian Alberto Urdaneta found that the graceful Venezuelan capital resembled "la coqueta Versalles y no el anecdótico y monumental viejo París"; the tiny Caracas was also prettier than Bogotá, which had "aspecto y mucho mejor sabor de ciudad", however (1960: 383-84). Their closer contact with Europe and France made Venezuelans more advanced than his countrymen in artistic matters, according to Colombian Isidoro Laverde's *Viaje a Caracas* (1885). In terms of literary taste, the popularity of Alexandre Dumas and Eugène Sue among Caraquenian señoritas just confirmed a French-oriented worship which had spread "la lengua de Molière" since the mid-century - as Sandford and Lisboa had noticed (Laverde, 1885: 46, 117). Encouraged by their French lessons, Caraquenian children sometimes gave priority to the reading of Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* over Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, in a sort of ritual initiation for their adult rendezvous with French culture; for - as Madame Roncayolo remarked upon upper-class Caraquenians after her years in Guzmanian Venezuela - "leur études terminées, ceux d'entre eux qui le peuvent vont passer quelques années

aux États-Unis ou en Europe. Paris surtout les attire. Ils y viennent sans doute poussés par le désir de s'instruire, mais aussi curieux de connaître *de visu* cette capitale dont on raconte tant de merveilles" (Roncayolo, 1894: 154; Bolet, 1931: 181-89).

In addition to their literary taste, Caraquenian ladies' fashion was ruled by French canons. Since the Septenio, they had apparently adopted some of Mrs Guzmán Blanco's novelties, such as the hire of French hairdressers and *modistes*, as if it was impossible that "una mujer que habla el idioma de Castilla pueda cortar un traje á la moda". Though initially reluctant to accept the Parisian fad, the traditionalists' chauvinistic point of view had to yield: "el buen gusto es francés". Francia es la patria del espíritu" (Sales Pérez, 1919: 13). Results were remarkable by the Quinquenio, when Madame Roncayolo testified that female toilettes "prétendent suivre les modes de Paris" in detail (1894: 157). Curtis could then confirm that Caraquenian belles were clearly more charming and more cosmopolitan than the so-called "daughters of the sun" - their traditional rivals from Lima:

"The Venezuelan girl has more animation, more vivacity than her sister across the Cordilleras, and perhaps more intelligence, for she possesses more liberty of thought and action than the ladies in other countries of Spanish America, and more attention is paid to her education ... Their features are usually of artistic perfection and their figures Venus-like. They have no national costume, but dress in the latest Paris styles. The milliners and modistes of Caracas go to Paris twice a year, and the wives and daughters of the rich men of the country order their dresses there. There is more society than in Peru, and during the winter season Caracas is very gay. At the opera the boxes are invariably filled with ladies as handsomely dressed and as highly bejewelled as can be seen at the Metropolitan Opera House or the Academy of Music in New York." (Curtis, 1888: 282).

With such elegant women and such *beau monde* - fuelled by the publication of further etiquette manuals - the Frenchified civilization of Guzmanian Caracas resounded internationally. The Spaniard José Güell y Mercader praised the Europeanism of Caracas during the Guzmanato as a continental miracle (1883: 207). This miracle was consecrated in the Anglo-Saxon world by Curtis: social life in Caracas was "very much like it is in the continental cities of Europe", and the Venezuelan capital was "a sort of one-story Paris" (1896: 153, 168). Though some of the flattering judgements were allegedly biased towards the government, the *Ilustre Americano's* prowess was definitely propagated outside Venezuelan frontiers. As well as being a Versailles-like capital for the Colombians, the Caracas of the Exposición was also a petty Paris for visitors from the civilized world. The Guzmanian fiesta of progress and civilization was thus recognized as a complete success.

"To arouse your senses to the importance of Architecture, in regard to its Monumental Attributes - to arrest your admiration, by its impressiveness as the leading agent in Pictorial Romance - to fascinate your sympathies, by exhibiting its venerable forms as the vehicles of glowing Association - and to stimulate your imagination, by advocating its claims as a Material Poetry"

George Wightwick, *The Palace of Architecture: a Romance of Art and History* (1840)

## PUBLIC WORKS

15. There was a correspondence between Guzmán's national fiesta of progress and civilization and his urban project for Caracas, which had to be dressed up as a capital of the nineteenth century. Speaking to his congressmen in 1873, the president envisaged that project in the following

terms:

**"La ciudad de Caracas necesita, para poder ser digna capital de Venezuela, del doble de agua que goza hoy, con su enconduchado de hierro; necesita sustituir el alumbrado actual por el de gas, que es la luz de las capitales civilizadas; necesita de pavimento interior donde estén distribuidos los enconduchados del gas y del agua potable, con la debida separación de las cañerías que requieren el aseo y los desagües de una población que empieza a ser numerosa; necesita, en fin, de algunas obras de ornato, tan indispensables a la vida civilizada como lo son al progreso material todas las que os dejo antes enumeradas." (Guzmán Blanco, 1876: 46).**

A twofold association was thus established by the young president, from the Septenio onwards: infrastructure and services underpinned the urban progress of a prosperous capital, whilst civilization materialized in its ornamental works. The association was to reappear in some of Guzmán's letters to his wife. In the midst of their personal agenda, the husband sometimes reported to Ana Teresa his urban breakthroughs for the country and the city - as if he referred to the purchase of new family assets she would like to hear of. After letting her know that a set of napkins they had ordered from Paris had already been received, Guzmán immediately added:

**"Ya tengo en reparación todos los caminos y casi restablecida la instrucción popular, rehechas la plaza Bolívar y las calles de Caracas y Valencia, donde también se trabaja en un Capitolio y en colocar los tubos para el agua de la ciudad ... Ya encargué los muebles de Santa Ana y estoy concluyendo el teatro" (1-IV-1879, Castellanos, 1969: 428-29).**

A few days later, he insisted enthusiastically: **"Tengo ya asegurados los ferrocarriles de La Guaira y Puerto Cabello. He comenzado el teatro, y la Iglesia de Santa Ana estará con sus altares, muebles y demás accesorios**



antes de tres meses." (6-IV-1879, Castellanos 1969: 421). The news about the Basilica - devoted to Ana Teresa's namesakes - not only evinced the president's reconciliation with the Church, but also his personal and possessive tone when referring to urban works which were executed throughout the country. If the president found enough time to inspect the furniture of a basilica, the absent caudillo longed to be back in his native city so as to oppose any attempt at moving the official capital, as well as to ensure that budgets for the repair of streets or the ornamentation of the Plaza Bolívar were implemented according to his plans (25-I-1871, 28-X-1871, *Memorandum*, 1875: 102, 163-65).

Though often criticized for that personal appropriation, such an attitude reveals the president's and the caudillo's relentless concern for *his* urban project. From regional thoroughfares and urban streets to the décor of a theatre, that project always combined infrastructure and ornamentation as the two main strands which mirrored Guzmán's double search for progress and civilization. Infrastructure and ornamental works, as well as being preparations for the fiesta, were thus basic ingredients of the modernizing project masterminded by the far-sighted president, who thereby increased the commercial attraction of Caracas for the North Atlantic bloc (Lombardi, 1982: 191-95).

16. Boosting the execution of public works as the cornerstone of his urban project, Guzmán's administrative innovations started by encouraging the participation of the private sector in public undertakings. In 1870 there was created the Compañía de Crédito, which involved foreign investors like the Boultons and the Röhlis as patrons for urban works, such as the Capitolio

buildings, the statue of Bolívar for the new Plaza, and the amelioration of Caraquenian streets. Private developers were also included in the invigorated Juntas de Fomento y Ornato, which amounted to 7 in Caracas and 20 in the whole country. Each composed of about 10 members - some of them European immigrants - they were supposed to collect and manage funds for particular urban projects, whose execution also relied upon the same boards (Zawisza, 1989, III: 41). A similar structure was adopted for the Juntas Inspectoras, composed of "celadores urbanos" which supervised the execution and maintenance of major works, as well as the accomplishment of urban dispositions on the appearance of houses, conservation of gardens and public spaces, and so forth. Works of public ornament were also protected from damage by the police (20-IX-1875, 27-VII-1876, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 28, 91-92, 128-30; 3705, 1-X-1886; 3723, 4-XI-1886, *Recopilación*, 1891, XIII: 134; 151-52).

As a result of the reorganization of public administration into 7 cabinet ministries, on August 24, 1874, there was created the Ministerio de Obras Públicas (MOP) - the highlight of Guzmán's urban apparatus. Including two main departments of "vías de comunicación y acueductos" and "edificaciones y ornato de pueblos", the MOP thereafter provided the ideal platform for integrating the two strands of the Guzmanian project. During the Septenio alone, the official expenditure on public works could thus rise to 23.93% of the national budget, in contrast with 2.19% during the previous government. In the case of Caracas, public works on both infrastructure and ornamentation were confirmed in the 1879 reorganization of the DF, whose priorities were thus coupled with the MOP's agenda on the national level (23, art.8, GDF, *Decretos Orgánicos*, 1879: 16-17; Zawisza, 1989, III: 38).

Most of that administrative and financial boosting of public works was due to Guzmán himself. This was proved by the fact that the programme was loosened or suspended during his interregna in Europe, when presidents Francisco Linares Alcántara (1877-78) and Joaquín Crespo (1884-86) lost the thread of the original project. Works like the Caracas-La Guaira railway were immediately picked up as soon as "el Génio Creador de Guzmán Blanco" was back in power, as Aristiguieta acknowledged after criticizing Linares's neglects (1879: 27-28). The same happened with the Juntas for Caraquenian streets, reestablished at the very beginning of the Aclamación, after their suppression by Crespo (2717, 31-XII-1884; 3614, 21-V-1886, *Recopilación*, 1888, XII: 6, 591).

The Guzmanian apparatus pioneered the administration of the urban question in Venezuela. Empowered to provide major urban infrastructure nationwide, the MOP was the first administrative body specifically aimed at urbanizing a country whose backward rurality had remained untouched since colonial times. Besides setting the basis of modern planning by providing the regions with communications and embellishing the towns, the "public works" allowed for the first time in Venezuela the implementation of expropriation for the sake of public utility (Brewer Carías, 1980: 72). Though not so permanent as the MOP - which would last for a century - the rest of the Guzmanian institutions also underpinned the urban administration in Venezuela, which thereafter was envisaged as an official issue assumed by the state and supported by the private sector.

17. Innovations did not only occur in the administration but also in the academic and professional fields, where different steps were taken to

improve the technical and artistic quality of public works. In this respect, the boosting of engineering had to become a priority for an administration highly committed to the construction of infrastructure. Included since 1874 as the fifth faculty of the Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV), the Facultad de Ciencias Exactas graduated Engineers who had gone through diverse courses - including Architecture - modelled on the curriculum of the Parisian School of Bridges and Roads. A chapter of the Academia de Matemáticas since the 1860s, the Colegio de Ingenieros de Venezuela (CIV) also became an autonomous and influential body, progressively shaped through various decrees. After the elimination of the Facultad de Ciencias Exactas in 1883, engineering was incorporated into philosophical studies - a shift that mirrored a less positivistic and more rhetorical approach (2077, 15-XII-1877; 2345, 27-VI-1881; Caraballo, 1986: 55-56).

At the same time, the boosting of architecture was a necessity for the ornamental strand of the Guzmanian project. Up to then, there had been the problem of the so-called Architects, who were in fact civil engineers who had had an ill-balanced education with “un exceso de ciencia matemática que no llegaron a utilizar y una escasa preparación sobre Arte y su historia” (Seijas Cook, 1936: 323-24). Guzmán did not manage to solve the problem, but he implemented some measures which helped correct the situation. During the Septenio, there were attempts to include architecture within the projected Instituto de Bellas Artes and Instituto de Venezuela, the latter inspired by the Institut de France; these plans were not carried out, however (Boulton, 1968, II: 152-54; Caraballo, 1986: 63-64). During the Quinquenio, “Arquitecto de la República” was recognized as an additional title issued to professionals who successfully submitted further examinations through the CIV (2379, 1-XII-1881, *Recopilación*, 1884, IX: 450). Alongside artistic

drawing, painting, sculpture, declamation and music, architecture finally became, during the Aclamación, a 3-year-programme of the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, which would complement the architectural instruction of the UCV engineers (3930, 1-VIII-1887, *Recopilación*, 1891, XIII: 496-98). The concern for improving the ornamental quality of architecture was extended to craftsmen employed on public works in Caracas, who were obliged to attend the Escuela de Artes y Oficios for two and a half hours each day, under the Juntas' supervision and with the government's subsidy (2606, 8-IV-1884, *Recopilación*, 1887, XI: 77).

Besides making him very popular among the craftsmen of Caracas, the most important effect of Guzmán's patronage was the constitution of a group of professionals who were no longer considered as mere engineers, but as Architects who actually performed important roles during the Guzmanato. Amongst them, there were converted engineers, such as Roberto García and Jesús Muñoz Tébar, who became MOP Ministers, and Manuel Felipe Herrera Tovar, professor at the Academia de Bellas Artes. There were also men educated in both engineering and architecture in Paris: Luciano Urdaneta Vargas, who studied in the Central School of Bridges and Roads during the 1840s; and twenty years later, Juan Hurtado Manrique, MOP Minister and professor at the Academia, who turned out to be the most prolific designer of Guzmanian works. Although some of these works occasionally involved a touch of foreign participation demanded by the president himself, most of the new monuments of Caracas were entrusted to Guzmán's team of Venezuelan architects, "sin que su marcado europeísmo lo indujera a importar profesionales de otras naciones" (Seijas Cook, 1936: 323).

While responding to the two mainstreams of his urban project, professional reforms on engineering and architecture also mirrored Guzmán's own interests in the evolution of building disciplines, attested by some of the books in his private libraries. They ranged from Manuel Valdés's technical *Manual del Ingeniero y Arquitecto* (1859) and William J. Fryer's *Architectural Iron Works* (1876), to the more poetic approach of George Wightwick's *The Palace of Architecture: a romance of art and history* (1840), obviously including some volumes of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie des Beaux-Arts*. Through all of them, Guzmán modelled what engineering and architecture came to be in positivistic Venezuela: the materialization of the ideals of progress and civilization, science and beauty (*Inventario...*, 1892; Caraballo, 1986: 54).

18. Wightwick's plea for palaces which should exalt the pictorial and poetic attributes of monuments could certainly kindle Guzmán's desire for an architectural romance with Caracas, whose flat skyline had been broken by new ornamental works since the early Septenio. Starting from the historic centre, there was the 1874 renewal of the former Plaza Mayor, until then an open market according to the colonial Spanish tradition: the new Plaza Bolívar was cleared and redesigned following a *rond-point* pattern, presided over by a statue of the Liberator, forged in Munich. Even the French visitor recognized that the statue, "bien qu'un peu forcée dans quelques-uns de ses détails, elle offre un ensemble imposant"; the whole design not only astonished Caraqueños but also inspired a new national type of plaza, different from Spanish, French and English ones (Tallenay, 1874: 71; Zawisza, 1989, III: 170). On the southern side of the Plaza, the Palacio Arzobisbal was also refurbished in 1877, this time with a splendour which

would probably have satisfied Lisboa's demands.

Further southwards there was built Luciano Urdaneta's new Capitolio, including the Palacio Legislativo (1872) and the Palacio Federal (1877), to which Roberto García also contributed. The construction of the ensemble had entailed the expropriation and expulsion of the nuns of the Convent of the Concepción by presidential decree (6-IX-1872) - a shocking episode for pious Caraquenians. Allegedly inspired by the buildings of the 1844 Exhibition of Paris which Urdaneta had visited, the Capitolio clustered round a magnificent patio with a fountain which reproduced the one which Guzmán had seen in the Place de la Concorde. When receiving the Palacio Federal, the president said that it represented the beginning of a new era of freedom, progress and civilization (González Guinán, 1954, X: 141; Zawisza, 1989, III: 72). In the next block, the façade of the former University was recreated (1873-75) by Hurtado Manrique in a flourished neogothic style. Guzmán's favourite also designed a museum which later became the Palacio de la Exposición; the palace was flanked by the Paseo Guzmán Blanco, presided over by an equestrian statue of the Ilustre Americano which came to be known as "El Saludante". Called "bulevar" by Caraquenians using for the first time the term of Second-Empire Paris, the Paseo even excelled real Parisian boulevards, according to the Colombian visitor's flattery (Urdaneta, 1960: 383).

Northwards, the Freemason president ordered the construction of the Templo Masónico (1876), designed by Hurtado in a neobaroque style. Following a secularization from the religious into the civic which recalls Napoleon's transformation of Sainte Geneviève into the French Panthéon, the La Santísima Trinidad church was converted into the Panteón Nacional

(1874-76), devoted to preserving the remains of national heroes of the Independence wars. Secularization continued southwards of the centre, with the replacement of the colonial San Pablo church by Muñoz Tébar's Teatro Guzmán Blanco (1881). Furnished in a sort of Victorian bric-a-brac, the theatre was originally provided with 8 different stage-sets, including a Gothic palace, a Louis-XV salon and a modern parlour (Zawisza, 1989, III: 144).

The president's reconciliation with the Catholic church began with Hurtado's neoclassic Basilica de Santa Ana y Santa Teresa (1875-81), a creole version of Parisian La Madeleine which came to be the masterpiece of national architecture (Seijas Cook, 1936: 327). As he commented in the aforementioned letters to Ana Teresa, Guzmán himself supervised the execution of the basilica, "decoré et garni de chaises et de prie-dieu à l'europeéene", according to the French visitor's impressions (Tallenay, 1884: 104). The painter Manuel Otero even had to copy Guzmán's face as a model for Saint Paul's in the fresco of the dome, following the vain president's hint that it was very alike to an ancient canvas of the apostle he had allegedly seen in a London museum (Díaz Guerra, 1933: 116-17). The programme continued northwards with Hurtado's Santa Capilla, explicitly ordered by presidential decree to be built "á semejanza de" the Parisian Sainte Chapelle; the latter's decorative details were lavishly reproduced in some plates of Richard Norman Shaw's *Architectural Sketches from the Continent* (1858), also in Guzmán's personal library (2484, 26-III-1883, *Recopilación*, 1891, X: 282)

On the outskirts of the city, there were built Muñoz Tébar's public slaughterhouse (1875) and a new cemetery (1876) which would have satisfied Eastwick's expectations; both installations were complemented by



ordinances which regulated their municipal services (3-VIII-1876, CMDF, 1876, *Ordenanzas*, 119-28; 184-89; Landaeta Rosales, 1994: 22-23). There was also a new Paseo on the El Calvario hill (1873), crowned with the Lourdes chapel and another statue of the Ilustre Americano. Though disposed by the Caraqueñan government as an homage to a great man who had enhanced the country with "todos los progresos de la civilización", the French-designed statue came to be mocked popularly as "El Manganzón" - the idler (14-II-1874, 29-X-1875, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 62, 105-108). Four new bridges, some of them ordered from England and locally assembled by Urdaneta and Hurtado, hinted at the directions of the Caraqueñan suburbs, in one of which stood Guzmán's luxury country palace of Antímano (2609, 9-IV-1884, *Recopilación*, 1887, XI: 78).

19. Although the Venezuelan geographer Miguel Tejera hastened to proclaim the European level of Caraqueñan works such as the University and the slaughter house, contemporary visitors were more cautious when ranking Guzmanian monuments in comparison with international standards (1875, I: 384-90). Having witnessed the beginning of the programme during the Septenio, Spence foretold that "Caracas will soon be as noted for the beauty and magnificence of its public buildings as it now is for the everlasting spring of its climate and the loveliness of the scenery amidst which it stands" (1878, I: 108). He was apparently right, at least in relation to Anglo-Saxon taste: American and English visitors to the city would thereafter agree about the quality of some of Guzmán's buildings, especially the Capitolio and the Teatro Guzmán Blanco, later known as the Teatro Municipal. Curtis found that the former was "the largest, handsomest, and most useless building in Caracas, and one of the finest in South America";

the theatre also was a "magnificent building ... and although the interior is rather bare of decorations ... in its equipments and arrangement the house is equal to any in New York" (1888: 271-72). The American Richard Harving Davis included the Pantheon jointly with the Federal Palace and the Opera house as the "three great buildings in Caracas"; the Capitolio apparently impressed him a great deal as well: it "is light and unsubstantial-looking, like a canvas palace in a theatre, and suggests the Casino at a French watering place" (1896: 249-50). One year later, the English Ira Nelson Morris confirmed that the theatre was "built with much refinement of taste"; and, despite Curtis's criticisms, Guzmán's luxurious residence in Antímano also struck the Englishman as a true palace: "It is a palace fit for a czar or emperor surrounded by parks of rare beauty, and in itself a grand and stately home, it presents a unique appearance to the visitor" (1897: 120, 196). By the turn of the century, on the other hand, American William Lindsay Scruggs's aesthetic assessment stressed the too elevated costs of the Guzmanian buildings: the Capitol was "a large and showy edifice, though somewhat cheaply built of rather inferior materials"; whilst not justifying its original cost, the Opera House was nonetheless "a credit to the capital, and would be an ornament to almost any city in the United States or Europe" (1900: 211, 217).

Tommaso Caivano's Italian taste was basically satisfied with the landmarks highlighted by Britons and Americans. The exterior and the interior of the theatre were quite acceptable; so was the eclectic design of the Capitolio, which "non ubbidisce a nessuno dei noti stili classici; ma quale più, quale meno lontanamente, li ricorda tutti"; the ensemble was harmonious, and its urban image offered "un effetto all'insieme gaio e grandioso, e tale da poter fare bella figura in qualsisia delle migliori città d'Europa" (1897: 228-30).

Other travellers from Europe seemed to prefer the Guzmanian gardens instead. Coming straight from Paris and London, the Argentinian Cané was very sceptical when arriving in the former provincial capital of the Spanish Empire, where he knew it was pointless to look for “los suntuosos edificios de Buenos Aires o Santiago de Chile”. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that there were “dos puntos que podrían figurar con honor en cualquier ciudad europea”: El Calvario and the Plaza Bolívar. As at the Santa Lucía hill in Santiago, the Exposición in Lima, the Botánico in Rio, the Prado in Montevideo and Palermo in Buenos Aires, through the elegant greenery of El Calvario the Argentinian traveller experienced a peaceful recollection of his beloved Europe (1942: 44-45). One year later, much the same was apparently felt by the nature-loving Lady Brassey, who confirmed that El Calvario was “tastefully laid out and planted” and “evidently” modelled on the plan of the Santa Lucía hill (1885: 190). By the turn of the century, the Spaniard Ramos y García also labelled the Plaza Bolívar as “el Jardín público más bello y elegante de Sur-América”, whereas the Lourdes chapel in El Calvario was thought to be “severa, fantástica y pintoresca como un paisaje de la montañosa Suiza” (1901: 7-8).

However, *comme d'habitude*, the more demanding French taste was disinclined to admit close parallelisms with Parisian standards. After her 3-year sojourn in the Guzmanian country, the daughter of the French consul in Caracas and the marchioness of Tallenay confessed in Paris her dishonesty when she had been forced to flatter the naive chauvinism of the Caraquenians:

“On comprend donc combien il est difficile, pour quiconque a résidé parmi les Vénézuéliens et s’y est créé des relations d’amitié, de ne pas froisser leur sentiments en indiquant, par-ci par-là, dans ce concert de louanges,

quelques fausses notes.

'Comment trouvez-vous Caracas? disaient les uns; ne ressemble-t-il à Paris?'

'Avez-vous en Europe, demandaient d'autres, d'aussi jolis squares que la place Bolivar?'

Et il n'y avait guère moyen de les contredire" (Tallenay, 1884: 90)

20. Twentieth-century critics inherited Madame de Tallenay's deep reticence concerning the value of the Europeanized architecture of the Guzmanato. The problem is rooted in the iconoclasm which new monuments represented for conservative Caraqueñians. Indeed, Guzmán's programme of ornamental works was not only conspicuous and ostentatious for a former capital without palaces, but also heretical for the post-colonial city: his secular architecture was "abonada, fatalmente, por escombros valiosos, pergaminos de los creyentes días castellanos, desplazados de las áreas más centrales capitalinas" - a replacement for which his critics would never forgive him (Seijas Cook, 1936: 323). In addition, there stands the question of his Frenchified sham, which comes from Guzmán's polemical significance in political terms. Though with a disdainful recognition that in some brief spaces there appeared "la ilusión de un rincón" of Second-Empire Paris, most of Guzmán's works have been regarded as a "caricature" of those of the Napoleons. His palaces were dismissed as "Tullerías de bolsillo" where the president mirrored his Parisian nostalgia, whereas his churches were supposedly erected according to the plan of the first French emperor. Likewise, the "gótico de mampostería" of some flourished façades has also been denounced as another imitation of Napoleon III by the snobbish president, who even tried to copy the fake revival of the Middle Ages in Second-Empire Paris (Díaz Sánchez, 1954, 23; Uslar Pietri, 1969: 163-64;

Zawisza, 1985: 55; 1989, III: 105; Meneses, 1995: 121).

In spite of those criticisms, most of Guzmanian works have finally come to be accepted from an architectural standpoint, though their urban value has remained underestimated. Not only has the mere hypothesis of an urban programme been negated, but also it is argued that Guzmán's monuments were hurriedly built following a construction mania which recalls Haussmann's lack of an integral plan for Paris. Only a metaphorical image of a plan under the sign of Bolívar has been suggested - in which case the sign spread across the city was not only that of the Libertador but also of the *Ilustre Americano* (Galey, 1973: 84; Polanco, 1983: 84; 1992: 594; Zawisza, 1985: 241-42).

Nevertheless, some urban virtues have to be acknowledged in Guzmán's monumental works. Although they cannot be considered "urbanistic" in the modern sense, those works tackled the long-lasting problem of reconstructing a post-colonial capital still marked by the 1812 earthquake. By the addition of scattered yet well-distributed buildings, Guzmanian architects also succeeded in putting some accents on the monotonous chessboard of the centre. Even though the monuments lacked a sense of baroque perspective, they were given an urban value for the first time in Caraquenian history (Gasparini, 1978: 11-13; Zawisza, 1989: 21; Meneses, 1995: 119). Probably modelled on Wightwick's principles, Guzmán's urban ornamentation gave birth to a new era of monumental architecture - an architecture of new dimensions which contrasted with the ornamental myopia of previous Caraquenian rulers. In contrast with the former capital without palaces, the Guzmanian capital now offered to foreign visitors more than one palace worth remembering. In addition, the absence of an urban

plan can be justified in terms of the small size of the Guzmanian capital, which did not yet demand a structural transformation. However, even though Caracas did not provide the material conditions for a Haussmannesque surgery, Guzmán's architects did their best in order to reproduce a Parisian vocabulary in the new buildings - the only means they had in order to prove their Europeanism.

"...sino porque esa costumbre se opone abiertamente al grado de cultura á que ha llegado esta capital: Que se alcanzan grandes ventajas con el servicio urbano hecho por medio de carros, que es hoy el aceptado en todas las poblaciones de gran comercio y movimiento industrial."

Decreto 2765, 24-I-1885

## THE URBAN POLICING AGENDA

21. The "policía urbana" had been the traditional framework for municipal administration since pre-Guzmanian times. Besides the control of public order, the 1845 *Ordenanzas de Policía Urbana de Caracas* included sections on civil architecture and the alignment of streets; organization of guilds; public salubrity, public cleanliness and comfort; provision of water; and regulations on public markets and cemeteries (Diputación, *Ordenanzas*, 1846). In contrast with the traditional way in which these aspects had hitherto been controlled, the Guzmanian administration was to modernize the urban policing with a new apparatus of decrees and ordinances. Let us now try to identify those municipal innovations which - jointly with the public works already considered - completed the urban project of the Guzmanato.

Starting with civil architecture, the first manifesto of Guzmán's municipal

conception was the 1871 *Ordenanza sobre Policía Urbana y Rural*. The alignment of central areas was tightly controlled; houses had to be enumerated and their façades cleared of debris which might obstruct free transit. The dimensions for new streets were set at 50 varas long and 12 varas wide, plus tiled pavements between 1.5 and 2 varas wide<sup>9</sup>. Straw-roofed houses were forbidden, and their owners encouraged to replace them with tiles (18-II-1871, arts. 1, 3-4, 5-6, 9, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 7-9)<sup>10</sup>. Paving and naming of streets and enumeration of houses were later reinforced by presidential decree, whereas new street names were officially adopted in the 1881 census (23, arts. 14-15, GDF, *Decretos Orgánicos*, 1879: 14-15; *Segundo Censo*, 1881, II: 12 ff.). For the sake of the ornamentation of the city, the Frenchified Guzmán of the Aclamación even replaced some features of Hispanic architecture such as vernacular *aleros* (gable-ends), for which exotic cornices were substituted. By the Exposición times, Guzmanian dispositions had already altered the aspect of new Caraquenian houses, in which the Colombian visitor found no trace of Spanish architecture (3737, 29-XI-1886, *Recopilación*, 1891, XIII: 168; Urdaneta, 1963: 490).

In order to facilitate the administration of the growing capital, Guzmán provided the Caraquenian government with an up-to-date topographical plan of the whole city, including its newly-created 7 parishes: Altagracia, Catedral, Santa Teresa, San Pablo, San Juan, Santa Rosalía and Candelaria (12-IX-1874, 17/19-IV-1875, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 76-77, 83-85). In the outskirts of the city, there was an attempt to regularize the urban network: besides the dispositions included in the 1871 *Ordenanza*, street extensions should go as far as the 20 m-wide banks of the Guaire river

<sup>9</sup> The vara was equivalent to 0.835 m

<sup>10</sup> Articles of ordinances are sometimes included, after their date of issue

- according to another ordinance which followed a presidential mandate. For the sake of the "comodidad y ensanche de algunas de sus calles", different public works were later decreed in the outskirts of Caracas, including the aforementioned bridges which communicated with the embryonic suburbs (17-VI-1872, 10-VI-1875, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 86-87; 2609, 9-IV-1884, *Recopilación*, 1887, XI: 78). In view of these measures, one can say that Guzmán probably cherished the idea of extending the city as much as possible; and, had Caracas required a plan for urban expansion - as some other Latin American capitals did by that time - the president would probably have undertaken it with relish. But, let us repeat, Caracas was too small a capital for Guzmán's ambitions: the city did not trespass its colonial boundaries not because the president "no tuvo aliento" - as it has been suggested (Armas Chitty, 1967, I: 206) - but rather because the expansion was not yet necessary.

22. Traditional controls on public salubrity were tightened by the 1871 *Ordenanza*. Under the supervision of the police, doctors, pharmacists and midwives were obliged to report to municipal authorities the outbreaks of contagious diseases. Urban inhumations in churchyards were banned and so was the use of former graveyards in the inner city; when the new Cementerio General del Sur was inaugurated, more sophisticated rules were passed. The conditions of food in public marketplaces was supervised by local authorities, including a doctor of the municipal board of health, who also was responsible for inspecting the hygienic conditions of hospitals. Public salubrity was also invoked when regulating the location of refuse sites, factories and slaughterhouses in the outskirts of the city. House owners were forbidden to throw away rubbish in the streets, and later obliged to



install grills in their private access to sewers (CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 10-22, 72-73, 119-28; Landaeta, 1994: 22)

But municipal dispositions had not apparently sufficed to improve the sanitary aspect of the capital by the early Septenio. The Venezuelan physician José Manuel de los Ríos then denounced the dirtiness of Caraquenian streets, which were also polluted by the noxious effects of small factories in the middle of the city. "A este concurso de circunstancias creemos que se debe la insalubridad de esta ciudad: por todas partes encontramos focos de descomposición que alteran la atmósfera, desarrollando en ella influencias deletéreas" (Ríos, 1874: 19). Using incomplete data and vague arguments, Toribio González excused the situation, pleading the lack of "anales higiénicos y de esos consejos de sanidad que desde muy atrás funcionan en Francia y otros países". Pointing at the "insalubridad ambiental" due to the natural conditions of Caracas, the chairman of the Facultad Médica nonetheless recognized the "relative" problems caused by the state of sewers and the inner-city location of small factories and the slaughterhouse (GO, 1-X-1874)<sup>11</sup>.

In view of the debate, the policing of waste disposal was reinforced by establishing further refuse sites in each Caraquenian parish (GO, 8-III-1873). But most of the official response came from the central government, for which public cleanliness became a sort of obsession during the rest of the Guzmanato. The cleaning of private and public buildings was regulated by later decrees, and there were dispositions for refuse sites in the suburbs, where domestic rubbish had to be carried (GDF, *Decretos Orgánicos*, 1879: 16-17). A presidential command established that private dwellings had to be

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<sup>11</sup> Editions of the *Gaceta Oficial* are to be quoted as GO, followed by its date.

cleaned daily, whereas the local government was responsible for maintaining public buildings. Though Linares Alcántara abolished the latter official duty, it was reestablished by Guzmán during the Quinquenio; the local government was thereafter responsible for supervising the cleaning of private houses as well (1956, 18-XII-1875; 2054, 26-V-1877, *Recopilación*, 1884, VII: 270, 508; 2233, 1-X-1880, *Recopilación*, 1884, VIII: 486-87). During the Aclamación, the obsession with cleanliness was apparently replaced by a stronger concern for the external appearance of the city. Citizens were obliged to sweep the front of their houses at least every Wednesday and Saturday, whilst the Juntas Inspectoras were responsible for the maintenance of public spaces; a few days later, Caraquenians were obliged to paint and furbish the façades of their houses (3723, 4-XI-1886; 3730, 15-XI-1886, *Recopilación*, 1891, XIII: 151-52; 165).

The results of all these efforts were already noticeable by the end of the Septenio, when Rafael Villavicencio offered a positive assessment of the "aseo público" of the Guzmanian capital. Besides its natural advantages, "las medidas tomadas últimamente por la policía para alejar los basureros, para evitar el que se arrojen á la calle los desperdicios de las casas, como también la mejora de las antiguas alcantarillas y el establecimiento de muchas nuevas que dan fácil salida a las aguas sucias" brought about "un estado de aseo público que es el mejor que puede desearse" (1880: 111). The cleanliness of Caraquenian streets was also praised by the Colombian Urdaneta, who was much delighted with the mechanical system of sweeping the streets - the same as that used in Paris. Houses of Caracas also looked better than those of Bogotá, since traditional paints had been replaced by new oil-based materials, which gave a more modern image to the city. Recognized by Laverde as cleaner than the Colombian capital, Caracas was

also labelled by Urdaneta as "la clásica ciudad del aseo" among all those he had ever visited (Laverde, 1885: 31; Urdaneta, 1960: 384-86). But despite these conspicuous achievements, Guzmán's crusade for cleaning was more concerned with the embellishment and the external appearance of the city than with a proper concept of hygiene. Though not totally neglected - as it has been suggested (Rondón Marquez, II: 187) - this concept was understandably beyond the Guzmanato's sanitary horizon. Merely hinted at by Guzmanian scientists like de los Ríos and Villavicencio, the hygienical agenda would only take root in Venezuelan society by the end of the century - as we shall see in the next chapter.

23. Controls on public behaviour also featured in the urban agenda of the president. Since the early Septenio, licenses for selling all sorts of alcohol - except wine - were taxed, while its consumption in public places was banned. Drunken and noisy Caraquenians were fined and even arrested, not only for the sake of family rest and social decency, but also for representing a "mengua de la civilización y del crédito de la autoridad pública". For similar reasons, popular tambours and fandangos were only allowed on the eve of official fiestas, and only with previous permission from the police. Games of chance were also banned from public places and their timetable regulated (18-II-1871, arts. 97-99, 105-8, 112; 30-IV-1873, 6-II-1874, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 26-28, 55-56, 99-104). All of these controls were applied by additional police prefectures created by the central government, who thus backed the parishes' traditional responsibility in public order (2184, 3-XII-1879, *Recopilación*, 1884, VIII: 325). During the Aclamación, further presidential decrees tried to reinforce the decorum of the capital: beggars were thereupon barred from Caraquenian streets, since they were

supposed to find accommodation in shelters provided by national charities; public games and the consumption of alcohol were repeatedly restricted as well (2144, 15-IV-1879, *Recopilación*, 1884, VIII: 190; 3707, 5-X-1886; 3729, 12-XII-1886; 3755, 31-XII-1886; 3875, 25-VI-1887, *Recopilación*, 1891, XIII: 135, 164-65, 223, 468).

Although pre-Guzmanian Caracas could not have been such an immoral or dangerous city, the police service and public behaviour were notably improved, and this was praised by visitors as an achievement of the new administration. Coming from turbulent Manchester and hazardous California, Spence easily confirmed that in the Septenio capital - where there were about 100 criminal cases a year - "less outward appearances of crime and disorder were visible than in any other town I ever saw" (GO, 26-II-1876; Spence, 1885, II: 118-19). By the end of the Quinquenio, Laverde found that the Venezuelan capital was safer than Bogotá (1885: 48), whereas Curtis praised the effectiveness of the Guzmanian police:

"The police arrangements in Caracas are excellent; there are no robberies or murders, and one seldom sees an intoxicated man upon the streets. Liquor is sold at nearly all the groceries, or bodegas, as they are called, and the *aguardiente* which the common people use is the most vicious sort of fire water; but the punishment of offenders is extreme, and those who have not sufficient self-control to drink moderately are taken in charge by their friends at the first sign of intoxication" (Curtis, 1888: 220).

Even though public order had already been present in the traditional agenda of the municipal policing, the safety of Guzmanian Caracas was due to the new concern for public behaviour - inspired to a great extent by the president's notion of decorum. At the same time that the urban setting was being embellished with public works, Guzmán's theatrical propriety sought to

dignify the whole Caraquenian scene by controlling the performances of the urban actors. In this respect, a dirty house was as indecorous as a beggar, a gambler or a drunk; and so was the violent Carnival descended from colonial times, which was transformed, from the early Septenio onwards, into an elegant festival worthy of a civilized capital (González Guinán, 1954, X: 144-45, 242). Through that obsession with public decorum - which made him ban his wife from seeing men during his absences from Caracas - the puritanical president probably honoured his heartfelt admiration for the mores of Victorian England (Paris, 16-I-1868, Castellanos, 1969: 41; Galey, 1973: 89-90).

24. There were other questions included for the first time in the municipal agenda by the Guzmanian administration, which did not always have great success. One of these was the case of housing: on the grounds of ameliorations in streets and pavements, central houses were taxed from the Septenio onwards - whether they were occupied by owners or tenants (23-VIII-1875, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 88-89). Combined with the soaring prices of urban land, new taxes had not brought about good results by the time of Lady Brassey's visit, when many empty houses were noticeable in Caraquenian streets: "proprietors are too poor to live in themselves, and too proud or obstinate to let them at a reasonable rent". The result was an artificial shortage, in which rents were "as dear as if the supply were unequal to the demand" (1885: 194). The shortage in the centre probably speeded up the government's contracts with Rafael Domínguez, the Boultons and other entrepreneurs to build about 500 working-class lodgings on municipal grounds in the outskirts of Caracas. Some of these houses were apparently funded by Guzmán himself, who paid "muchísima importancia al sistema de vida

de las gentes poco acomodadas", according to the Colombian visitor's favourable report (Urdaneta, 1963: 493-94; Nazoa, 1977: 150).

More coherent and effective were the new measures adopted on traffic and transport - a more sustained contribution of the Guzmanian agenda. The 1871 *Ordenanza* already restricted the circulation of horse-drawn carriages, whilst beasts were barred from urban roads unless their owners had permission from the police (18-II-1871, arts. 87, 90-91, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 24-25). During the Aclamación, the circulation of mules, donkeys and other beasts of burden was excluded from the central streets of Caracas, not only because they disturbed the traffic, "sino porque esa costumbre se opone abiertamente al grado de cultura á que ha llegado esta capital: Que se alcanzan grandes ventajas con el servicio urbano hecho por medio de carros, que es hoy el aceptado en todas las poblaciones de gran comercio y movimiento industrial" (2765, 24-I-1885, *Recopilación*, 1888, XII: 23-24). The example of progressive and civilized capitals was also invoked when targeting the more urgent problem of freight transport between the city centre and surrounding railway stations; the Governor then explicitly asked for "*Camions* como los que se usan en París, Londres y Nueva York" (GDF, *Memoria*, 1884: 56). The imitation of world capitals was complete with the first line of horse-drawn trams, launched in October 1885; by the end of the Aclamación, there were already two tram lines and twelve carriage enterprises (Landaeta, 1889, I: 148). Guzmán's increasing concern for urban decorum was evident in additional regulations for the new transport services: public coach and carriage drivers had to prove their expertise and moral suitability for the profession; their demeanour was so tightly controlled that they were even forbidden to smoke while working (3722, 30-X-1886; 3770, 28-I-1887, *Recopilación*, 1891, XIII: 151).

Once again, achievements in public transport were acknowledged by visitors. Whilst Lisboa had found only a few two-wheel cars to hire in pre-Guzmanian Caracas, Urdaneta referred to 400 carriages of two categories: 160 *de plaza* or standard public ones, usually driven by Italians; and the rest of luxurious victorias and landaus, driven by Creoles. Although Italian chauffeurs were apparently not very polite, the Colombian finally recognized: "Todo cochero usa reloj y va bien calzado, y como los de su oficio en todas las grandes ciudades, conocen todos los sitios y se muestran cumplidos con quien sabe darles su propina" (Lisboa, 1954: 66; Urdaneta, 1960: 387-88). Drivers also carried a horn which they blew upon approaching a street-crossing, a practice that Curtis had seen in Mexico; the American was nonetheless surprised that Caraqueñan passengers were not allowed to smoke, unlike Mexicans or Cubans (1888: 280, 284). The visitors thus celebrated another urban miracle worked by the *Ilustre Americano*: with its central streets mainly traversed by horse-drawn trams, landaus and victorias, Caracas emulated the progressive means of transport of the main nineteenth-century capitals. Though far from reaching Parisian variety or congestion, the president of the *Aclamación* could thus re-create some of the standards and elegant images depicted in Victor Geruzez's *Paris à cheval* (1884), which Guzmán apparently acquired for his library during his second interregnum in the French capital.

25. Guzmán's urban policing agenda for Caracas has been praised in this century for upgrading Venezuelan urbanism from the Spanish codes of the post-colonial era to the European standards of the industrial age. The semi-peasant Caracas devastated by civil wars was thereby transformed into a

capital worthy of a nineteenth-century state (Galey, 1973: 77, 89; Nazoa, 1977: 148; Zawisza, 1985: 241). With its restless concern for improving Caraqueñan services and customs, the Guzmanato informed a modern agenda of urban policing which tried to harmonize with the new public works - which confirms, once again, the articulation of the strands of Guzmán's project. Despite its conspicuous centralism, this agenda was managed consistently by the municipal and central governments, both of which had the civic virtue of bringing to public attention those areas of urban life which might and should be improved. Though not articulated in a plan, the ingredients of Guzmán's urban project thus constituted the first targets of public intervention in Venezuela's municipal history.

Nevertheless - as in the case of his public works - recognition of the value of Guzmán's municipal project has been overshadowed by the obsession concerning his imitation of Haussmann's agenda for Second-Empire Paris (Galey, 1973: 89; Díaz Sánchez, 1966: 10). Let us not, therefore, delay any longer the question of Haussmann's alleged influence on the Guzmanian urban project; but let us try to address it through an approach which could result in different, less accusatory and more open-minded conclusions than those traditional criticisms. For that purpose, Haussmann's urban principles must first be identified and set in their European perspective. Secondly, the Haussmannization of other Latin American capitals must be contrasted with the case of Caracas. Thirdly, it must be said that the attempt to elucidate the actual influence of contemporary French urbanism on Guzmanian Caracas cannot involve either a description of Second-Empire Paris or a report of Haussmann's works - both of which tasks, as well as being beyond the scope of this research, have been accomplished many times. Instead, our attempt must only focus on the Haussmannian principles allegedly



associated with Guzmán's project, in order to check their actual comparability. On a historical level, the allusions to the Prefect and his works in the public debate on Guzmanian Caracas should be inspected. Finally, we should attempt something which has not been done before: the categorization of the Guzmanian project in terms of urbanistic history and the recognition of its epistemological contribution to modern Venezuelan urbanism.

"...Nous l'accusons d'avoir sacrifié d'étrange façon à l'idée fixe et à l'esprit de système; nous l'accusons d'avoir immolé l'avenir tout entier à ses caprices et à sa vaine gloire; nous l'accusons d'avoir englouti dans ses œuvres d'une utilité douteuse ou passagère, le patrimoine des générations futures; nous l'accusons de nous mener au triple galop, sur la pente des catastrophes."

Jules François Ferry, *Comptes fantastiques d'Hausmann* (1868)

## HAUSSMANN IN THE AIR

26. Baron George Eugène de Haussmann's *Mémoires* (1890-93) are the best source from which his ideas can be drawn. Although they are not a theoretical work but a reflective and detailed account of his *Grands Travaux* as Prefect of the Seine (1853-70) during the Second Empire, the *Mémoires* nevertheless state the basic principles of his practical urbanism. The Baron starts by regretting that the critics of his transformations never considered that the central streets of Paris were previously "impénétrables à la circulation"; that is why - giving "ce qui dispense la salubrité" and respecting historic and artistic monuments - his surgery systematically applied the means to satisfy the necessities of a more active traffic (Haussmann, 1979, I: 28-29; II: 53). Circulation, hygiene and concern for the monumental therefore emerged as basic principles of the so-called "urbanism of regularization",

characterized by the "disentanglement" of the old Parisian tissue through a new circulatory system and an open-space surgery (Choay, 1969: 15-18).

Being classified according to their financial requirements and their articulation through different systems or "reseaux", public roads certainly occupied a great deal of the Prefect's endeavours and budget. The circulatory system was at the same time conceptualized as an instrument for spreading the "services de la voie publique" and new open spaces - from the Bois de Boulogne and Bois de Vincennes to the tiny green places all over Paris. In this respect, the "dual concept of a circulatory and respiratory system" can be labelled as the "real basis as well as the originality of his planning" (Choay, 1969: 19; Haussmann, 1979, I: 55-100, 133 ff). At the same time, the circulatory network was used for improving the distribution of water, air, light and the basic conditions of hygiene, which "plus que jamais" had to become the basis of urban organization. Even though hygiene certainly inspired most of his monumental works of underground infrastructure, his concern for sanitation was influenced by Britain and Germany, where public health reforms had started in the 1840s (Pinkney, 1958: 40; Haussmann, 1979, II: 124-25).

The Baron's endeavours to regularize and furnish the Parisian tissue were undertaken without disregarding the importance of monumental perspective: "Je n'ai jamais arrêté le tracé d'une voie quelconque, et à plus forte raison d'une artère principale de Paris, sans me préoccuper du point de vue qu'on pouvait lui donner", asserted the Prefect (1979, II: 278). This can be said to have been another clue to his astonishing success: even though the grid of services was due to the functional rationality of a new industrial era, the "far-sighted engineer" managed to lay it out according to the monumental

principles of French baroque, thus demonstrating that the emerging industrial city could be beautifully planned as well (Pinkney, 1958: 220-21; Abercrombie, 1959: 91; Mumford, 1961: 399-403; Londei, 1982: 102-7).

Modern conceptualization of the so-called "Haussmannian cycle" embraces not only the Prefect's works but also the social and symbolic apparatus of the Second Empire, whose echoes resounded in France until World War I. The enlarged interpretation of that cycle includes further associations in different directions. Facilitated by the regularization of Parisian streets, the control and maintenance of public order was supposedly a hidden target of the Prefect's works, which have often been regarded as bastions of a highly centralized regime (Pinkney, 1958: 214; Ragon, 1971: 90-96; Roncayolo, 1983: 93, 155). In administrative terms, there were innovations such as the emergence of a specialized municipal bureaucracy, which has been related to the new technical principles of industrial rationality. In this respect, the expropriation was introduced for the first time as a legal tool which made easier the vast renewal of Paris. Although expropriation was not enough to regulate the free market and private property, the Haussmannian enterprise remains as a "vigorous synthesis" between both public and private forces intervening in the city at the same time (Sica, 1977, II: 120-26; Brunetti, 1978: 15; Londei, 1982: 48-49; Roncayolo, 1983: 133). Lastly, there is the quaint eclecticism of Haussmannian monuments, which provided an architectural platform for academic ideas coming from the Beaux-Arts tradition. Belittled as it often is for this reason, Haussmann's work still constitutes a key urban link in which "two centuries of spasmodic but artistic planning" were turned into "clear-headed logic in town modernization" (Pinkney, 1958: 220; Abercrombie, 1959: 91; Choay, 1983: 187).

27. Defined by Lavedan as “la méthode des percées, l'éventrement des anciens quartiers, ce qu'on pourrâit nommer l'urbanisme chirurgical”, the so-called “Haussmannian pattern” or “Haussmannization” was widely exported to French colonies during the late nineteenth century (Lavedan, 1954: 142; Choay, 1969: 19). Being eager to participate in the capitalist-industrialist order symbolized by that urbanism, semi-colonial Latin America became a devotee of such a French product *par excellence* - at least according to international and regional interpretations (Benevolo, 1975: 823; Romero, 1984; Gutiérrez, 1984; Hardoy, 1990). Although the actual level of Haussmannization - or the authentically-Haussmannian nature of the transformation - can only be discussed for the case of Caracas, let us first glance at the main vectors of that exportation into some other Latin capitals.

Two consecutive yet different cycles of Haussmannization in post-colonial Latin America have been distinguished. The first cycle was the “systematization” of the urban network of the capitals, which basically took place within their colonial boundaries during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although the urban results were not comparable with those of European capitals, Haussmannesque boulevards and avenues were superimposed on the colonial layout. The second cycle included the urban renewal and enlargement of Latin capitals up to World War II, always with external references to the Haussmannian model (Sica, 1977, II: 773-74). Epitomizing at the same time the metropolitan myth imported from industrializing Europe, the Haussmannian example was used by local elites for staging the cultural transition from their post-colonial towns into bourgeois cities. This transition obviously was more conspicuous in the capitals of expanding economies, where a proper bourgeoisie was

emerging on the basis of embryonic industrialization (Romero, 1984: 249, 282-84).

To turn our attention now to the first cycle of the aforementioned transformations, which was contemporary with the Guzmanian episode<sup>12</sup>: the Baron's main contributions to the biggest Latin capitals have been traced in the baroque lines of new neighbourhoods, as well as in the huge public parks and tree-lined avenues. Traditional examples include the Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City, supposed to be the first copy of a Parisian boulevard in the New World; the Parque de Palermo and the Avenidas de Mayo, Corrientes, Córdoba and Belgrano in Buenos Aires; the Avenida Central in Rio; the Paseo del Prado and the Avenida Agraciada in Montevideo; and the Parque Forestal and the Santa Lucía hill in Santiago - the latter reckoned by visitors to have "evidently" inspired Guzmán's El Calvario (Brassey, 1885: 190; Cané, 1942: 44-45).

The Prefect of the Seine has also been associated with the rulers of some cities. Torcuato de Alvear, mayor of Buenos Aires (1883-86), came to be known in his own time as the Argentine Haussmann. So was Francisco Pereira Passos, prefect of Rio (1903-1906), who had studied in Second-Empire Paris and had already participated in the design of an 1871 planning scheme during the presidency of Correia de Oliveira; the latter's transformation of the Cidade Velha was inspired to a large extent by the Baron's ideas. Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, mayor of Santiago, had also proposed in the early 1870s a transformation plan for the capital, "without doubt inspired by the redesigning of Paris begun by Haussmann"; though the plan was approved in 1892, it was not finally implemented (Gutiérrez,

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<sup>12</sup> References to the second Haussmannian cycle are to be included in the next chapters.

1984: 675; Needell, 1987: 33-51; Hardoy, 1990: 32-34).

But Haussmann's "ideological presence" in Latin America during the nineteenth century must be toned down from a theoretical perspective. The Prefect himself, in fact, was rarely identified as an urban model in the contemporary debate; instead, his name appeared late, and rather as an exemplar for the centralism and power required for the transformation of big capitals. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that not all the Baron's principles had arrived in nineteenth-century Latin America. From the baroque lines of new avenues and the Bois-de-Boulogne-like pattern of some parks to the "French style" of architecture, associations have been established on the grounds of the physical and symbolic apparatus of Haussmannization - a range which certainly mirrored the Prefect's morphological principles. Nevertheless, his hygienical reforms were apparently not included in the first Haussmannian bag of ideas which arrived in Latin America; they were to be discovered by the end of the century, and in a different way. Neither, apparently, did Latin Americans perceive the articulated conception of an urban surgery which assembled circulation, services and monuments - a surgery which would arrive even later, at the turn of the twentieth century.

28. The problem of the Haussmannian example in the case of Caracas presents a different scale and particular connotations. Unlike the major Latin American capitals, Guzmanian Caracas did not require big avenues or other interventions on its tiny colonial grid - as we have already seen. Haussmann's influence has therefore been suggested on other aspects, such as the architectural eclecticism and the Second-Empire ethos of the

city, its lack of plan, and its supposed concern for sanitation. Nevertheless, associations have been established on the basis of Guzmán's alleged imitation of Napoleon III and Second-Empire Paris rather than of the Prefect's own ideas and works (Díaz Sánchez, 1954: 23; 1966: 10; Uslar Pietri, 1969: 163-64; Galey, 1973: 84, 89; Zawisza, 1985: 55; 1986: 242). So it is time to clear up the *Ilustre Americano's* Haussmannization from the historical point of view.

On the one hand, Guzmán obviously shared with his favourite Hurtado Manrique a taste for the eclecticism of the 1860s Paris they had lived in, and which they tried to reproduce in the tiny Venezuelan capital. In those years, the young diplomat must have noticed Napoleon III's urban policies for railways and the funding of public works, which would influence some of his progressive measures as president, particularly the creation of the MOP. Furthermore, it is very likely that Guzmán was aware of Haussmann as the Emperor's right-hand man dealing with all those reforms. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be any historical reference to Guzmán's ever having visited the Parisian public works - as there is of his visiting those of Saint Nazaire and Nantes, when he arrived in France in 1879, with due pomp as Venezuelan President (González Guinán, 1954, XII: 97-98; Rojas, 1972: 32, 52).

On the other hand, the Prefect's articulated surgery for the sake of circulation, hygiene and monumentality has been disregarded by Venezuelan critics, just to force a coincidence with Guzmán's alleged lack of plan for Caracas. If such a coincidence has also been hinted at in relation to the sanitary agenda, it must be considered that Haussmann's underground works were due to a continental concern for health and housing reforms

which spread across industrializing Europe. In any case, the Guzmanato's sanitary agenda rather tackled superficial cleanliness and external appearance; the proper hygienical reforms were far from arriving in Venezuelan society.

Another curiosity of the Haussmannian question in the Venezuelan debate has to do with its political connotations: whilst in other Latin capitals the Prefect seemed to be a positive reference used to label the urban work of their rulers, in Caracas the Second-Empire example has rather been used for political recriminations against Guzmán. Indeed, a strong political taste can still be perceived in most twentieth-century architectural criticism of Guzmán's works - a critique which echoes his association with Napoleon III, and started in the Guzmanato years. A former comrade who rapidly became one of his bitterest opponents in the early Septenio, General Luis Level de Goda triggered off the attack against Guzmán's administration in a virulent pamphlet called *Venezuela y el General Guzmán Blanco* (1873); his poor imitation of Napoleon III in terms of public works was denounced there:

"El General Guzmán Blanco, imitando a Napoleón III, aunque muy en pequeño, y tristemente, pretende ganar á los pueblos de Venezuela y en especial al de Caracas, con las mejoras materiales; y al efecto procura que que se haga grande alharaca con la fabricación de edificios y caminos, etc., y con la construcción, así como con el arreglo de la hacienda pública y la deuda; pero por fortuna el pueblo de Venezuela es bastante avisado e inteligente y no caerá en esa red." (Rojas, 1972: 52)<sup>13</sup>.

The pamphlet had rapid effects: some of Guzmán's ministers hastened to

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<sup>13</sup> Published in Bogotá - where Level was exiled - the 1873 original edition has not been found in the main libraries of Caracas, and seems to be a document scarcely known, even by local historians; this is why I reproduce the quotation from Rojas. Nevertheless, I was able to consult the 1875 edition, published in Port Spain (Trinidad), whose text was slightly reformulated by the author.



clear their position in relation to Level's allegations, writing tracts which confirmed the political twist of the debate. Interior Minister Diego Bautista Urbaneja reckoned the president's capacity to work as being superior to his ambition, whereas Foreign Minister Jacinto Gutiérrez stressed the immaculate reputation and attitude of the members of the Juntas in charge of the public works programme (Urbaneja, 1873: 12; Gutiérrez, 1873: 10-11). In a second edition of the pamphlet, Level still attacked the president's vainglorious habit of denominating the public works with his own name: "Por qué un gobierno tan liberal, y siéndolo Guzmán Blanco, aparece en todo su personalidad y llevan su nombre, Guzmán Blanco, los Estados, los caminos, los puentes, los puertos, los edificios, las poblaciones, las calles, los paseos, los acueductos, los parques, etc., etc.?" (1875: 13). Some years later, Guzmán himself replied that the Septenio works were "como murallas de su gloria, contra las que han de estrellarse todos los gobiernos ambiciosos e ignorantes, hoy como mañana y como siempre" (1878: 10). By the year of the Exposición, the political row was far from being over: the panegyrical Hortensio claimed that Guzmanian works had contributed to the consolidation of peace, whereas the detractor Manuel Briceño jibed that the Centenary's monuments reminded him of a Rome subject to the tyrants (Güell y Mercader, 1883: 209; Briceño, 1919: 140).

More than Haussmann's urban principles themselves, this strand of argument recalls the debate which followed the publication of Jules Ferry's *Comptes fantastiques d'Haussmann*; there the author had bitterly opposed the new loans demanded by "l'autocrate de la Prefecture", during the last years of his Louis XIV-like municipal reign (1868: 46). If the Prefect did indirectly appear in the contemporary debate in Guzmanian Venezuela, it was more as an instrument of Napoleon III's progressive policies than as an

urban reference as such. As we shall see, Haussmann's new urban system was not to be identified properly till much later, at the beginning of this century. In the meantime, from the urbanistic point of view, the Baron's presence in Guzmanian Caracas can only be conjectured from its Second-Empire ethos and architectural eclecticism: Haussmann was in the air, but not yet materialized in the tiny capital. In addition, from a historical point of view, Haussmann's easily-alleged influence on Guzmán's urban project must be regarded as a particular case of "Napoleonization": in lieu of the Baron, it was the Emperor who really sparked the prolonged debate about what can be called the "comptes fantastiques de Guzmán".

29. From the point of view of urban historiography, the Guzmanian urban project does not belong to the Haussmannian era. With the addition of circulation and hygiene as principles of his monumental urban surgery, the Baron pioneered the incorporation of functional elements of the new industrialism into the traditional design based on artistic principles. In doing so, Haussmann set the basis of the so-called "urbanism of regularization", whose surgical principles were to influence later interventions in major European cities as well as their theoretical reports (Choay, 1969: 15-21). Among the latter, there were Ildefonso Cerdá's *Teoría general de la urbanización* (1867) and *Der Städtebau* as a combined version of Camillo Sitte's artistic principles (1889) and Baumeister's urban engineering - all of them attempts to deal with the problem of the artistic city which was becoming a technical object (Brunetti, 1978: 26-27; Wieckzorek, 1981: 82; Charre, 1983: 96; Ladd, 1990: 113).

In terms of its scale and its pretheoretical principles, Guzmán's modest

project was understandably far behind Haussmannian "urbanism". According to the preindustrial Venezuela of the nineteenth century, the Guzmanian approach to its tiny capital had to remain within the so-called "art urbain" or "architecture urbaine", aimed at embellishing the public spaces in the preindustrial city before the arrival of technical urbanism - according to the categories provided by French urban historiography (Lavedan, 1926: 3; Bardet, 1951: 416-18; Harouel, 1985: 3). Although his programme of public works also included achievements in infrastructure and services, Guzmán's original concern for urban ornamentation and monumental architecture prevailed throughout what can now be called his *urban art*. As Argan demands of such an art, Guzmanian interventions represented a "valutazione della condizione oggettiva" of the city (1983: 86) - a valuation which would help to found modern Venezuelan urbanism.

Nevertheless, this artistic categorization must not lead us to disregard the administrative flank of the Guzmanian project, epitomized by its attempt to improve the urban policing of Caraqueñan life. From cleanliness and appearance to urban behaviour and decorum, the Guzmanato singled out the first areas of public intervention in the city - thus making an epistemological parallel with the "public intervention" which preceded the emergence of urban planning in industrialized societies (Sutcliffe, 1981: 204). And, although these endeavours to reproduce metropolitan models in a semi-colonial context might be regarded as a case of "cultural colonialism" in its "global scale" (King, 1976: 26-28), Guzmán undeniably pioneered Venezuela's first attempt to enhance and update an urban agenda which had remained untouched since colonial times.

"Hemos adelantado mucho! Vivimos en un pequeño Londres!"

F. de Sales Pérez, "La Adoración Perpetua" (1887)

## THE URBAN *DELPINIADA*

30. As a consequence of its high political costs in the volatile climate of reactions against the *Ilustre Americano*, Guzmanian urban art was to be obliterated by administrations after the *Aclamación*. Besides the aforementioned arguments about the *comptes fantastiques*, the Caraquenian intelligentsia always suspected the social effects of Guzmán's fiesta of progress and civilization on Venezuela's traditional society. Pervading the agenda of national and foreign intellectuals during the rest of the century - with echoes lasting into our own - the debate had started since the very *Septenio*, when so-called *costumbristas* (authors who wrote about local customs) noticed the first changes in the urban culture of Caracas. Public works in the capital were then saluted by writers like Francisco de Sales Pérez (Justo) as a proof of Venezuela's entrance into a new era of prosperity. In his sketch "El Polvo" (1873), the annoying dust produced by the new works in the city was celebrated as "el polvo de la paz, el polvo de la civilización, el polvo del progreso". The cloud of dirt which covered Caracas was then compared to the smoke over industrial London, the capital of the century:

"¡Qué polvo!

He aquí la exclamación que anda de boca en boca, y que nos sorprende por todas partes y á todas horas.

Caracas, á imitación de Londres, se envuelve en una nube sofocante.

Aquella de humo, esta es de polvo.

Una y otra nube anuncian el movimiento de las fábricas.

Acá, el edificio, la calzada, el acueducto.

Allá, la fundición, el telar, los artefactos.

Este, el pueblo que se incorpora á la marcha de la civilización.

Aquel, el pueblo que recoge ya sus frutos, y levanta á los cielos, en penachos de humo, la bandera del siglo." (Sales Pérez, 1919: 133, 136).

Nevertheless, Justo slyly noted that the thick cloud over Caraquenian streets was being used by those who traversed the capital without being identified, since they wanted to avoid embarrassing meetings; in this way, the writer did not miss his opportunity to hint that public constructions could be hiding shady deals.

Jointly with public works, the outward-oriented search for civilization was another motif for the *costumbristas'* caricatures during the Guzmanato. Though a prominent collaborator with Guzmanian regimes, Francisco Tosta García did not refrain from adding a touch of Creole mockery when highlighting Guzmán's achievements in the backward capital of the Septenio; as one of Tosta's characters recognized: "Aquí estamos muy atrazados, sí señor, y si hay algo en la capital que merezca la pena, debe usted reconocer, aunque sea tan amigo de la Reacción, que se debe á Guzmán Blanco, *oui monsieur*, al que llaman hoy autócrata, es á quien debe sus principales adelantos, yo lo digo siempre, pésele á quien le pesare, *comprehen est vous ?*" (Tosta García, 1883, II: 118). By the Aclamación, though, Sales was less humorous about the supposed bounties that civilization had brought to Guzmanian Caracas. Pointing at the moral dissipation often involved in the cultural importations from other countries, Justo claimed that the liberals' civilization had taken over from idleness as the mother of Caraquenians' vices:

"El partido que gobierna el país desde 1870 nos pone de manifiesto los palacios, los ferrocarriles, los acueductos, los templos, los paseos, los monumentos, y demás obras realizadas en su época, y, poseído de un

orgullo que considero legítimo, nos dice: 'Allí tenéis la Regeneración! Ahí tenéis la nueva capital embellecida y civilizada por nosotros!'

"Ellos tienen razón, pero yo no necesito de tantas grandezas para probar el adelanto de Caracas: á mí me gusta sacar las cosas más grandes, de las más pequeñas.

"Yo digo solamente: Contad las ventas de licores que hay en la ciudad" (Sales Pérez, 1902: 65).

Highly concerned about the consumption of alcohol in the pretended restaurants and *pâtisseries* of Caracas - whose public order was praised by foreign visitors in those years - the *costumbrista* again drew a parallel with London, but this time invoking the latter as the capital of perversion (1902: 54-55). For the rest of the century, progress and civilization were often to be regretted as a major iconoclasm against the historical heritage coming from colonial times, whose reappraisal was to be fuelled as a way of rooting out Guzmanian modernity. In one of his 1893 "Cuadros Caraqueños", Nicanor Bolet Peraza - one of Guzmán's bitterest opponents after the Septenio - complained about the disappointment that the young should feel about the new Plaza Bolívar. Expected to be "hermosa y espléndida como un pedacito de París", the redesigned Plaza had in fact wiped out the picturesque market of the former Plaza de la Catedral; the final result looked like a profanation perpetrated for the sake of progress, which had thus transformed a historic site into a fashionable venue (Bolet, 1931: 74, 99). Though tempered by his former collaboration with Guzmán's diplomacy, the marqués de Rojas expressed the same nostalgia for the sober taste and the Arcadian peacefulness of pre-Guzmanian Caracas. With its army of *modistes*, tailors and shoemakers, mid-nineteenth-century civilization had transformed Venezuela into a materialistic "pandemonium", disrupting the "patriarcales costumbres" of the post-colonial country. "O tempora, o mores!", exclaimed the marquis from his Parisian salon by the turn of the of the new century,

when yearning for the Creole nobility of pre-Guzmanian Venezuela (Rojas, 1967: 269-70).

31. During General Joaquín Crespo's first presidency (1884-86) the reaction against Guzmán himself had acquired its sourest taste, while the *rastaquouère* enjoyed his second interregnum in Paris. On February 14th, 1885, Francisco Antonio Delpino y Lamas - a poor hat maker who used to write eccentric verses - was laurelled and acclaimed by the anti-Guzmanian intelligentsia in a parody which took place in the Teatro Caracas. The apotheosis on the night of Santa Florentina not only included burlesque odes by Venezuelan poets, but also tributes paid by farcical ambassadors on behalf of major European literatures. The set of panegyrics was also published in a celebrated volume called *La Delpiniada* (1885), where one of the pseudonymous authors proclaimed:

"Esto, á más de ser un acto de justicia, es voz de aliento y poderoso aliciente para las generaciones del porvenir, que encontrarán en ellas tesoros de enseñanzas, y se sentirán impulsados por el deseo de seguir la senda luminosa que condujo al apogeo de la gloria y al trono de la inmortalidad, á Homero, á Virgilio y á Andrés Bello. Y sobre todo, este precioso libro irá á probarle a las naciones de Europa, donde se tiene una idea demasiado triste de nuestra literatura, que si Francia tuvo un Víctor Hugo, Inglaterra un Byron, Alemania un Goethe, Italia un Dante, España un Calderón, también bajo el cielo azul de nuestra joven América, hay hombres semejantes á aquellos colosos del sentimiento tales como Francisco Antonio Delpino y otros más." (*La Delpiniada*, 1966: 98-99).

On the literary level, the masquerade was a caustic attack against Guzmanian academicians, whose passé formalism had long since been stuck in Horace's odes, Hugo's translations and Espronceda's rhymes - as

Manuel Romero García's characters later complained in his *criollista* novel *Peonía* (1890) (1986: 281-83). For the same reasons, Alexandre Dumas was to be labelled "un gran corruptor de la patria", when the marqués de Rojas looked back at the stiff romanticism of mid-nineteenth century Venezuela (Rojas, 1967: 269). As a reaction against the narrow horizon of Guzmanian literature, Romero García and other organizers of the Delpiniada were eager for new Germanic sources, which were certainly incorporated into Venezuela's literary panorama after the return of the anti-Guzmanian exiles, led by the poet Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde - translator of Heine and Poe (Picón Salas, 1984: 119-20, 125).

But the much talked-about burlesque was mainly intended to mock the *Ilustre Americano's* vainglory, which had led him to accept an undeserved membership in the Venezuelan chapter of the Academia de la Lengua Española, as well as the Rectorship of the University of Caracas. The "cancer of vainglory" had certainly grown in Guzmán Blanco since the early Septenio, but the night of Santa Florentina evinced his entrance into the Latin caudillos' typical decline: "the losing struggle to retain supremacy" (Wise, 1951: 173). Despite the organizers' imprisonment, the buffoon's name was thereupon used to designate the anti-Guzmán reaction as the "Delpiniada"; meanwhile, the group of Guzmán's flatterers received the pseudo-religious sobriquet of "La Adoración Perpetua" - a metaphor which was further ridiculed by Justo when referring to Bacchus's worshippers in the Caracas of the Aclamación (Sales Pérez, 1902: 55).

Beyond this personal attack against a haughty leader, the Delpiniada triggered off a crisis of identity of post-Guzmanian Venezuela - a crisis which would extend into the novels and chronicles of the turn of the century, as we



shall see in the next chapter. In this respect, modern Venezuelan thinkers have set in perspective that first outburst of post-colonial schizophrenia, whilst prolonging the criticisms against Guzmán's iconoclasm. Already in 1939, Pedro Emilio Coll had recommended that the "delpinismo" should be regarded as "un fenómeno colectivo o signo de la debilidad muy humana, de suponernos diferentes de lo que en realidad somos, cual si con nuestro personal engreimiento, en ocasiones grotesco, nos empeñáramos en evadirnos de complejos de inferioridad que nos dominan en el entorno habitual" (1980: 395). Looking back at the fiesta of progress and civilization, Mariano Picón Salas denounced it as an act performed by Guzmán the illusionist and the iconoclast, in which the true backwardness of the rest of country was hidden in the apparent modernization of the capital (1966: 14; 1975: 13-14). With similar scorn, Arturo Uslar Pietri belittled Guzmán's tacky copy of "la Europa de peor gusto" - namely that of Victorian England and Second-Empire France - because that piece of fakery involved an alteration of the Venezuelans' taste, which had been sober until the early republican era (1952: 519).

In terms of urban culture, Delpino's burlesque spectre thus represented the dramatic end of a cycle in Caraquenian history. Inasmuch as the night of Santa Florentina was a natural reaction to Guzmán's iconoclasm against Creole values, the *urban delpiniada* can be regarded as a dialectical negation of Guzmán's Europeanized culture. After the post-colonial euphoria for Anglo-French dependence, the Guzmanian fiesta was over: Progressive London and civilized Paris were defied by the *costumbristas* as models for the Venezuelan capital, with outrage similar to that with which Guzmán's statues were knocked down by the mob, and Saint Paul's Guzmán-like face was erased from the fresco of the Santa Teresa basilica by its own parson

(Díaz Guerra, 1933: 117; Nazoa, 1966: 118). After such a turbulent reaction, the equitable recognition of Guzmanian achievements had to come from foreign observers. As the American visitor was to assert some years later, "you cannot wipe out history by pulling down columns or refacing inscriptions, and Guzmán Blanco undoubtedly did so much for his country, even though at the same time he was doing a great deal for Guzmán Blanco" (Davis, 1895: 258). Capturing both the historic drama and prowess of the vainglorious Caesar in his rural Venezuela, Vargas Vila certainly conceded to Guzmán's opponents that "su teatralidad, pomposa y fastuosa, fué el lado pequeño de aquél carácter, hecho todo de cosas grandes"; but the Colombian accurately pointed out to Venezuelans:

"de las aldeas hizo ciudades; de los caseríos, hizo aldeas; de la Capital, que era un villorio, hizo una de las más bellas ciudades de la América Ecuatorial;

de un pueblo heroico y mendigo,

hizo un pueblo ilustrado y rico;

de un país analfabeto, hizo un país letrado;

abrió una escuela, dondequiera que

antes se extendía una soledad;

ÉL ENSEÑÓ Á LEER Á VENEZUELA" (1913: 186).

### III THE BELLE ÉPOQUE: HYGIENE AND PROGRESS

"Vieja tierra de Albión, todo perezcel...  
 si hoy eres de los mares la sultana, tiembla al pensar lo que serás mañana  
 cuando tu ciclo á declinar empiece  
 .....

Si anhelas por lejanos vasallajes, y perpetuar anhelas tus blasones  
 hermanando el Poder á la Codicia  
 Sabe, que en esta tierra de *salvajes*,  
 nadie teme el poder de tus cañones,  
 sino el Santo poder de la Justicia"

Rafael Linares Bernal, "A Inglaterra" (1898)

#### THE MONROE FURORE

1. In addition to William McKingley's annexation of Cuba and Puerto Rico after the definitive expulsion of Spain from Caribbean waters in 1898, Venezuela offered the United States two opportunities to demonstrate that it was taking over from Europe as the dominating power in the Americas. In the mid-1890s, the Yankee administration had to intervene in the affair over a long-disputed strip of territory in Guiana - which had caused the rupture of diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Venezuela since 1887. The "Venezuelan question" became a resonant matter of honour for the American republics, who saw in Her Majesty's claim on the territory the revival of old European imperialism in their own continent. Cleveland's government opportunely decided to dust down the golden rule of the so-called Monroe Doctrine - "America belongs to the Americans" - formulated by President James Monroe in 1823. William L. Scruggs was appointed as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States to Venezuela; after his first visit to the country, the Minister challenged Britain's pretension in the following terms:

"Still, if England should finally decide upon this course, and under the flimsy pretext of a boundary dispute, of her own seeking, and which she has hitherto obstinately refused to adjust upon any just and reasonable basis, she should persist in her efforts to extend her colonial system within the territory and jurisdiction of an independent American republic, that factor would be but an additional reason, if any were necessary, why the United States should reaffirm, and maintain at all hazards, the principles of the declaration of 1823. The only alternative would be an explicit and final abandonment of those principles; and that would involve a sacrifice of national honour and prestige as no first-class power is likely ever to make, even for the sake of peace." (Scruggs, 1895: 32).

Taking advantage of such an international threat, the new first-class power of the Americas imposed its position. Having been settled in 1899 through the international arbitration of the United States, the question of the "disputed El Dorado" marked the beginning of the reversal of British supremacy in the continent (Whitaker, 1948: 158-60). When Theodore Roosevelt rose to power in 1901, the "Dollar Diplomacy" in the Caribbean was complemented with the project of the Panama Canal and what was called "Roosevelt's Corollary": if the United States wanted to take over from Europe as continental superpower, the former should help to overcome political upheavals and economic crises in the Caribbean and Latin republics (Munro, 1964: 4-7, 65-66).

The confirmation of Roosevelt's Corollary came shortly afterwards, with another miracle performed on the calamities of Venezuela. During the early years of General Cipriano Castro's presidency (1899-1908), political and economic turmoil led the bankrupt republic to cease the payments of loans and debts to Britain, Germany and Italy. Having received, since 1900, several warnings from the Disconto Gesellschaft's representative in

Venezuela, the eccentric president's interest in European affairs was more focused on financing newspapers edited by Venezuelans based in Paris (17-III-1900, 20-VI-1900, 17-XI-1900, Castro, 1974: 27880, 287-88). Even up to December 6, 1902, Castro assumed that Britain and Germany were "naciones civilizadas que cultivan relaciones de amistad con Venezuela"; but on December 9, a 15-ship armada from the two nations blockaded the republican coasts for the first time in the independent era. Inspired by Vargas Vila's declamatory style - a literary paradigm for Latin liberals - the same day Castro passed his famous proclamation, imbued with patriotic hatred against the European aggressors: "¡La planta insolente del Extranjero ha profanado el sagrado suelo de la Patria! ... El duelo es desigual porque el atentado ha sido consumado por las dos naciones más poderosas de Europa contra este nuestro país que apenas convalece de largos y dolorosos quebrantos" (Castro, 1962, II: 123; 6-XII-1902, 13-XII-1902, 1974: 312, 320; Rangel, 1964: 50).

Despite its obvious unevenness, the duel against Europe's mightiest nations revived the Latin caudillo's old rancour against their predominance in post-colonial Venezuela. Latin Americans' celebration of Castro's courage was remembered by Vargas Vila some years later: "En su duelo atrevido con las potencias europeas, emuló la Gloria de Juárez, y, se alzó mil codos más alto que el prusiano bárbaro que lo afrentaba y, el inglés rapaz, que amenazaba convertir, en un puñado de escombros, á aquel pueblo, el más heroico de la tierra" (Vargas Vila, 1913: 214-15; Picón Salas, 1991: 54-55). But the United States had to be more cautious with the European attackers, without passing over a situation which was to favour its Pan-American leadership. Having initially recognized the financial legitimacy of the creditors' demands, Roosevelt's administration nevertheless did not back the blockade and

intervened very promptly. After the mediation of H. Wolcott Bowen - the American Minister to Caracas - an international protocol for the resumption of the payments was signed in Washington in February 1903, where Bowen acted as Venezuelan agent. Despite his apparent Pan-Americanism, Roosevelt refused to welcome in his capital city that "unspeakably villainous little monkey", who had interrupted the American President's Big-Stick Policy and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean (Núñez, 1986: 117; Picón Salas, 1991: 259-60).

2. Having witnessed the Monroe furore in Venezuela by the late nineteenth century, the British traveller Ira Nelson Morris was inclined to believe that the United States, "like its emblem the eagle, which extends its broad wings to protect its young from harms or disturbance, has taken the position of affording its protection to all the young countries of the American continent" (1897: 153). But the protective eagle was mistaken by some Latin republics, who thereby felt invulnerable to the demands of European capitalism, whilst overlooking the imperialism portended by the eagle's claws. The same Scruggs would criticize the notions "entertained in some South American states", by which the Monroe Doctrine might be "successfully invoked to prevent a European nation from forcing an international obligation" against them: "The absurdity of such a construction is its own sufficient refutation," warned the Minister (1900: 256). But Venezuela's fascination with the Yankees after its first emergency with Britain seemed to ignore the Minister's warning, and Venezuelan intellectuals thereafter accommodated their country's position in relation to the Northern protector. "Hagámonos fuertes no contra los Estados Unidos, sino con los Estados Unidos," claimed a voice in the days of the dispute over the British Guiana (Liscano, 1898: 675-77). In

the months after the blockade, another voice recommended Venezuela to take advantage from those allies which "al alejar de nuestras playas toda agresión europea, valgan á consolidar nuestras incipientes nacionalidades y nos sirvan, al propio tiempo, para vernos á cubierto de cualquier régimen tutelar más o menos duro" (Rivas, 1903: 288).

After the blockade, Castro's liberalism flirted with the protection offered by the "Gran República del Norte", which he regarded as the New-World heir of the "Gran República Francesa". When thanking them for political support during the Anglo-German aggression, the Venezuelan president exhorted fellow statesmen to boost Pan-American integration on the basis offered by the United States, "tan interesados como nosotros en la grandiosa idea, debida al genio de nuestro Libertador". Another ally for this task was France, "esa nación noble y generosa que ha llevado siempre empuñada la bandera de la Civilización y el Progreso" (14-I-1903, 30-III-1903, 22-VII-1903, Castro, 1974: 331, 338, 345). On the other hand, the English leopard and the Prussian eagle represented the major threat for the tropical republics of Latin America, whose peril was not exorcised until continental integration could happen (Picón Salas, 1991: 244).

But Castro's honeymoon with Roosevelt's *pax americana* was to sour from 1904 onwards, when the "little monkey" opposed the interests of the New York and Bermúdez Company in the exploitation of asphalt in Venezuela. Thereafter the Andean caudillo's atavistic suspicion of the American imperialism revived, fuelled by Vargas Vilas's prophecies against the Northern barbarians - which Castro had probably read in his youth. The Latin dictator then remembered that the Yankees were "hijos de Inglaterra y nietos de Fenicia", whereas his own Latin being was "hijo de Francia y nieto

de Grecia". After reviving his old "predilección y cariño por las glorias de Napoleón" - which he confirmed to a friend who had sent to him from Paris a bust of the French Emperor - Castro's increasing absolutism justified the sobriquet of "El Cabito", a translation of Napoleon's "le petit caporal" (24-X-1903, Castro, 1974: 131; Rangel, 1964: 50, 61, 66). Drinking brandy, receiving ministers in billiards rooms and saunas and deflowering virgins supplied by his courtiers, the satyr let the last years of his reign go by in dissipation, while his health decreased and state affairs were neglected. When the United States finally conspired to overthrow the corrupt dictator in 1908, his admired Vargas Vila regarded him wandering "como un fantasma de César, que hubiese estrangulado un fantasma de República" (Vargas Vila, 1913: 222-23; Velásquez, 1979: 221-22, 379; Pino Iturrieta, 1988: 33-35).

In those days of Venezuelan bankruptcy, the Monroe furore had already produced a new cast of superpowers in the Americas. Changes had mostly affected the supremacy of the British Empire, whose last attempts against the Latin American republics had been blocked by their big sister, who would completely replace the political influence of Europe by the end of World War I. On the economic level, the supremacy of English manufactures in the Latin markets was no longer safe, being challenged by American and German products since the early twentieth century. Despite a relative recuperation in the decade after 1902, British investments in the area were also doomed to decrease gradually up to the late 1920s, by which time a century of financial supremacy was over (Rippy, 1959: 11, 36, 75; Carl, 1980: 139-40). Even with its strong economic presence, Germany would never defy the Monroe Doctrine again, and the possible dream of Latin America as another India - if it existed - remained as such (Herwig, 1986: 207-208). The definite



supremacy of the United States was to be sealed by World War I, which reduced European trade and investments, gave an impetus to American exports to the region, and left the United States "unchallenged in American waters" (Griffin, 1961: 131-32; Munro, 1964: 75; Stein, 1970: 190).

"¡Miranda preferirá siempre a Ariel; Miranda es la gracia del espíritu; y todas las montañas de piedras, de hierros, de oros y de tocinos, no bastarán para que mi alma latina se prostituya a Calibán!"

Rubén Darío, "El Triunfo de Calibán" (1898)

## ARIEL VERSUS CALIBAN

3. Before their economic and political consecration at the time of World War I, the Americans' ideological conquest of Latin America had to undergo several battles. Castro's late suspicion of the Northern eagle was always awake in Latin intellectuals. Ruben Darío - who fathered literary modernism in the Spanish-speaking world - had declared his definitive enmity against the barbaric Yankees since the very days of their humiliation of "la Hija de Roma, la Hermana de Francia, la Madre de América" (1989: 161, 166). This hatred was fuelled by the publication of some books which legitimized the Americans' takeover from Spain in the Caribbean, in view of the Anglosaxons' alleged superiority over tropical races. The thesis was epitomized in Benjamin Kidd's *The Control of the Tropics* (1898) - a manifesto which urged the establishment of Anglo-American protectorates in lieu of the former colonies of continental Europe. The British sociologist entreated the English-speaking world to define the "principles" of its relations with pretended "republics" plagued with "anarchy and bankruptcy",

especially Central and South American states, where unstable conditions attracted German expansionism. Britons and Yankees should assume that "in dealing with the *natural* inhabitants of the tropics we are dealing with peoples who represent the same stage in the history of the development of the race that the child does in the history of the development of the individual. The tropics will not, therefore, develop by the natives themselves". As an alternative to the old-fashioned policy of colonization carried out by continental Europe, the English-speaking world should thereafter take a grip on its responsibility of "holding the tropics as a trust for civilization" (Kidd, 1898: 41-58).

Whilst McKingley and Roosevelt carried out the Americans' part in such a crusade, Latin intellectuals looked for arguments against Kidd's plea. One of the first answers was to acknowledge that the whole of Latin America was *El continente enfermo* (1899), according to the diagnosis given by César Zumeta from New York. Though recognizing the political and economic failure of most Latin republics throughout the century which was about to end, the Venezuelan exile warned fellow citizens about Kidd's doctrine, exhorting them to face proudly the challenge of the new century: "hijos del trópico, debemos amarlo tal como él es, por sobre toda otra región del Globo, y ser capaces de protegerlo contra esas civilizaciones del becerro de oro" (Zumeta, 1899: 17). The Anglosaxons' Golden Calf represented the materialistic beast not only for humiliated Venezuelans but for many intellectuals throughout South America, who fought against the peril by invoking the spiritual tradition inherited from Latin Europe.

Rapidly becoming a pillow-book for a generation of youth, in 1900 there appeared a manifesto which called upon the cultural values of Latin America

in order to face the materialistic dilemma of the new century. José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* featured the Shakespearian character as a personification of the noble spirituality that the young republics of the South should oppose to the utilitarian Caliban lurking in the North. The twentieth-century combat was to be highly risky because of the "nordomanía" or moral conquest which had pervaded the Latin spirit, enticing it with "la visión de una América *deslatinizada* por propia voluntad, sin la extorsión de la conquista, y regenerada luego a imagen y semejanza del arquetipo del Norte" (Rodó, 1912: 66-68; Crawford, 1961: 79). Relying upon the critique of American utilitarianism provided by European thinkers such as Spencer, Renan and Taine, the Uruguayan writer not only alerted people to the expansionism of the northern neighbour but also attacked its values. Though he recognized their titanic achievements, the Yankees' obtuse, restless and materialistic industriousness was questioned as a valid model for the urban culture of Latin Americans: "Realiza aquella sociedad, o tiende a realizar, por lo menos, la idea de la conducta racional que cumple a las legítimas exigencias del espíritu, a la dignidad moral e intelectual de nuestra civilización? Es en ella donde hemos de señalar la más aproximada imagen de nuestra *ciudad perfecta*?" (Rodó, 1912: 76).

Warnings about the Americans' urban culture had been started by Rubén Darío, who abhorred their "abrumadoras ciudades de hierros y piedra", where he had gone through dark hours of "vaga angustia" (1989: 161). Although Rodó never visited the United States, he did acknowledge that the vast country had wonderful examples which could certainly arouse admiration and respect. However, it was very unlikely that the modern traveller approaching New York harbour and envisaging the Statue of Liberty's torch, could feel the same deep and religious emotion which the

ancient sailor arriving in Athens must have felt when perceiving Athene's golden spear. Hinting at metropolitan Buenos Aires, Rodó finally warned about the danger looming over those Latin American cities "cuya grandeza material y cuya suma de civilización aparente" ranked them amongst the leading capitals of the world: they could become the modern equivalents of Sidon, Tyre or Carthage. The image was doubly prophetic: Latin capitals should beware not only of the materialism emerging in the markets of Chicago, but also of the dependence on New York as the Rome of the New World (Rodó, 1912: 87, 94-95). Some years later, Rodó's disrespect for the Statue of Liberty was transformed into heresy by Zumeta from the entrails of the new Rome: when the American government decided to clean up the monument in 1907, the Venezuelan exile proclaimed that the clothes of "Miss Liberty" would always look "ensangrentadas" to all the descendants of humiliated Spain (Zumeta, 1983: 150)

4. An aggressive eagle disclosing the Yankee flag over Latin America was the cover of the first edition of Manuel Ugarte's *El Porvenir de la América Latina* (1911), where previous animosity against the Americans was framed in terms of a cultural battle. Having pinpointed the threat represented by the "Coloso del Norte" - a sobriquet which labelled the new fears across the continent - the Argentinian writer went back to the racial origins of the insuperable opposition between North and South.

"Es innegable que los yanquis han cosechado hasta ahora en el Sur algunas decepciones. Pero no es posible atribuirlo ni á la incapacidad de éstos para la conquista ni á la energía de aquéllas para la defensa. Hay dos fuerzas independientes que así lo imponen: el origen español, que nos hace ser hostiles á todo acercamiento con la raza enemiga, y los gustos, las ambiciones, las repugnancias, que Francia nos ha sugerido desde nuestros

primeros pasos en el camino de la Independencia" (Ugarte, 1911: 78).

Besides the humiliated yet worthy Spain, French civilization was thus invoked once again as one of the main ingredients of Latin nobility in order to defeat the enemy race. Despite its imperialist presence in other areas of the world, France was not perceived as a threat to the Latin republics, in the same way that Germany, other European countries or even Japan were (Ugarte, 1911: 113-45). At the outset of the cultural battle of the twentieth century, France still kept sound the intellectual "puissance" which she had gained in the early years of republicanism in Latin America (Griffin, 1961: 83-84; Blanc-Chaléard, 1992: 78).

For Latin intellectuals of the opening *belle époque*, France's cultural leadership was recognized in their cult of Paris. Rubén Darío had noticed that the French capital could not be appreciated by wasteful Americans: Paris was only "el *guignol* de esos niños salvajes" searching for Punchinellos. Instead, the City of Lights was a kaleidoscopic Mecca for Latin Americans who could sell themselves for a visit. "La moda tiene en París su imperio, y los sombreros de nuestras mujeres son flores grandes de un árbol que sólo crece allá. Francia nos enseña, nos domina, y sobre todo eso nos da algún poco de su vino de Champaña. París es el centro de nuestras aspiraciones. Mentalmente somos suyos; aguardamos que nos dirija una mirada, que nos *descubra* ...". This discovery was certainly distorted by the wealthy yet vulgar "hacendados" who could afford to live in the lavish city, where they were derided as "rastaquouères", "sauvages" and "Brésiliens". But the cosmopolitan writer insisted that the Latins' real appreciation of Paris was given to the "espíritus superiores, que sobre las pequeñeces de la vida nacional, vuelan á la gran ciudad, como centro de toda luz" (Darío, 1899:

78-79; 1989: 162). That is what Darío himself had done in the early 1900s, when he founded Latin American modernism on the basis of French influences, from symbolism to Impressionism.

Ugarte's and Darío's appeal for the cultural alliance of Latin Americans with France was extended to other European countries by Francisco García Calderón, one of the main heirs of the French-oriented thinking coming from Rodó. In his book *Latin America: its Rise and Progress* - originally published in French - the Peruvian writer demanded appreciation for the edifying resources offered to the Latin republics by the great nations of Europe. In lieu of the United States,

"Europe offers the Latin American democracies what the latter demand of Anglo-Saxon America, which was formed in the school of Europe. We find the practical spirit, industrialism and political liberty in England; organisation and education in Germany; and in France inventive genius, culture, wealth, great universities and democracy. From these ruling peoples the new Latin world must indirectly receive the legacy of Western civilization" (García Calderón, 1913: 311).

Latin America should thus inherit the Western values from their original exponents, not from the spurious translator of the North. The recommendation not only involved a reappraisal of European enlightenment, but also a deep contempt for the tasteless American way of life. Having condemned New York as "the octopus of a city", the author also stigmatized the race which had created it: "Neither irony nor grace nor scepticism, gifts of the old civilisations, can make way against the plebeian brutality, the excessive optimism, the violent individualism of the people." (García Calderón, 1913: 309).

5. Ariel's spirit had apparently vindicated the cultural supremacy of Europe over Latin America as the best weapon against the Colossus, but the overall results of the combat were not so favourable to Europe - as we have already seen. If the cultural refinement of Paris or London was still more charming than the hasty civilization of New York, the commodities of the Monroe Doctrine and American goods were captivating the nobility of the Latin spirit. Darío's Miranda started to hesitate.

At least in the case of Gómez's Venezuela, Miranda was to change her mind after World War I, when the Colossus of the North was given the virtues of a noble gladiator. The shift was easy to adopt, since some of the intellectuals of the Gómez era had kept a moderate position in relation to the Northern neighbour. Based upon Haeckel's distinction of the *Homo Americanus* and the *Homo Mediterraneus* among other species of the human genre, Gil Fortoul had recognized the existence of different "razas sociales", such as the English and the Spanish races. The Venezuelan sociologist certainly denied that the latter was the factor to blame for the economic, political and moral disarray of Latin America - as Gustave Le Bon had suggested, by contrast with the success of the United States. But Gil Fortoul at the same time considered that the question could and should be solved in sociological and not in political terms, as other Latin intellectuals had tried to do (1896: 4-5, 11, 31-32). Another step in this direction was taken by Pedro Manuel Arcaya, whose approach to the problem of the "Imperialismo Norteamericano" (1899) had demanded the Latins' contrition before going on with the critique of Kidd's thesis and McKingley's expansionism. Following Taine's fact-based methodology of analysis, the Venezuelan sociologist had pointed out that the North American peril was made possible

by the mistakes of the Latin republics: "El peligro es evidente para la vida de estos pueblos. Y se comprende su mayor gravedad al pensar en la profunda degeneración, conjunto raro de incapacidad y desorden á que hemos llegado en la mayor parte de las naciones ibero-americanas" (Arcaya, 1914: 319).

Some years later, before going to live in New York during the 1920s, the Venezuelan writer Jesús Semprún offered one of the most explicit appraisals of the victor of World War I, when he revised and amended South America's former ideas and feelings regarding the "tremenda República boreal". Blinded by their rhetorical loyalty towards Don Quixote's noble Spain, turn-of-the-century intellectuals had been poisoned against "Yanquilandia" because they could not grasp the magnificent significance of the release of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. By those years, Europeanized thinkers "hablaban del Norte como de país de niños gigantes y horribles, adoradores del Becerro de Oro, ricos sí, pero torpes y toscos". But the dreadful Caliban vanished after the War, when the Southern Ariels could realize that "los maestros de ayer estaban equivocados" (Semprún, 1983: 507-9). In contrast with the pseudo-history recounted by Darío, Rodó and Ugarte - according to which all Latin Americans were grandsons of a noble Cid who had been aggrieved by Uncle Sam's big stick - the Americans' altruistic participation in World War I had proved their amazing idealism: "Es verdaderamente una proeza digna del Ingenioso Hidalgo de la Mancha la que han realizado los hijos de Washington". As the new symbol of democracy and the other ideals of modernity, Uncle Sam's civic virtues were then distinguished from the European allies' interests in the recent conflict:

"Inglaterra defendía su poderío naval y sus dominios, al mismo tiempo que



la libertad que ha sido desde hace largas centurias su orgullo y su norte; Francia su integridad; Italia su porvenir. Los Estados Unidos defendían el principio de la libertad de las naciones y del predominio del derecho. Las ideas no pueden ser motores eficaces sino en los grandes pueblos espiritualistas y generosos, es decir, civilizados: los Estados Unidos se han colocado a la cabeza de la cultura cívica del orbe" (Semprún, 1983: 524).

Free from fears and suspicions, the South American republics could thus follow Woodrow Wilson's ideals in order to reach "el árbol pacífico, armonioso y fecundo de la libertad" (1983: 510-15, 527). After their economic and political supremacy had been established since the years of the Monroe furore, Semprun's celebration of the Americans' prowess in World War I mirrored their ideological conquest of post-War Venezuela. The Colossus had apparently defeated Europe in all the domains. The sole battle pending was to take place in the cultural arena, where the Latin Miranda still languished for European refinement.

"Caracas non è già il prodotto di una civiltà decrepita o semplicemente in ritardo, ma di quella civiltà novissima invece che si elabora nella grande fucina europea in questa portentosa fine di secolo"

Tommaso Caivano, *Il Venezuela* (1897)

## THE PARIS OF SOUTH AMERICA

6. Having witnessed the early scenes of the combat between Ariel and the Colossus in the Venezuelan arena, late-nineteenth-century visitors could anticipate the latter's economic triumph in the tropical country. In his chronicle *With the Trade Winds. A Jaunt in Venezuela and the West Indies*

(1897), Ira Nelson Morris already noticed the Americans' "steadily growing" interests in modern services. Launched by the Boultons jointly with American partners in the early 1880s, a "splendidly equipped line of steamers" linked La Guaira with New York, furnishing "as comfortable transportation facilities as can be found on any ocean" (Curtis, 1888: 257; Morris, 1897: 107-108). But when visiting Valencia - Venezuela's second city by that time - the American probably exaggerated the modernity of the long-distance telephone system operating within the country, introduced by American companies: "One can telephone from Valencia to Caracas, with less difficulty than from New York to Chicago" (Morris, 1897: 128).

By that time, the Venezuelans' incipient Americanization had also started to alter those social customs coming from the European tradition, such as the courtship rituals amongst upper-class *caballeros* and *señoritas*: "Before North American customs became introduced into Caracas, love-making among the best classes of Venezuelans was European in character. The suitor might not call on his lady unless some member of the family was present, even down to the very day of the marriage, and a breach of this custom was reason enough to lose the respect of one's friends. But now more natural manners in this respect have superseded the old, and the cavalier sends his card to the lady upon which he wishes to call, just as in the United States." (Morris, 1897: 121-22).

While visiting all the regions of the country at the beginning of the century, Briton Leonard Victor Dalton watched further dramatic scenes of the economic battle in inland Venezuela. Having recognized the commercial surrender of Britain to the United States, the Fellow of the Geological and Royal Geographical Societies noticed that American produce had

penetrated the country, though the Yankee was not quite welcomed yet:

"There is little need to inquire into the cause of this influx of American goods, when in travelling through even remote parts of the country one meets with travellers exhibiting and praising American inventions and manufactures such as are calculated to appeal to the Venezuelan public, and this in spite of the fact that at the present time the American, as such, apart from his personal attractiveness or otherwise, is not *persona grata* in the country. The big stores, with branches in most of the more important towns, are mainly in the hands of Germans, but the goods are largely British and American." (Dalton, 1912: 237-39).

Germans - who were present in shops and in major infrastructures, such as the Gran Ferrocarril de Venezuela, Germany's largest railroad enterprise overseas - strove to play a decorous role in the combat. But it was not the same with Britons. English supremacy as provider of manufactures had been largely replaced by the American "influx" in Venezuela since the late nineteenth century, as had happened in many other countries of Latin America. The replacement had increased by the early twentieth century, when Venezuelan trade started to attract more long-term investments from the United States (Vetencourt, 1981: 15; Lombardi, 1982: 204; Herwig, 1986: 33). Although the Colossus seemed to defeat Britain and win the battle for the Venezuelan economy, the American triumph was far from attaining the Venezuelan capital, where France and Europe would keep their cultural leadership for a longer period. Though certainly unlikely, Dalton's hopes that "afternoon tea" could someday become a more usual custom in Caracas were not completely dismissible (1912: 140).

7. When American Richard Harding Davis visited Venezuela during General

Crespo's second presidency (1892-98), the country welcomed him as it if were an oasis of civilization. The report given in *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America* (1896) contained a vein of positive surprise: "Venezuela, after our experiences from Central America, was like a return to civilization after months on the Alkali plains of Texas". This impression was mainly due to the relative sophistication of late-nineteenth-century Caracas, in whose central streets one could find that "next to the cathedral-tower are confectionary-shops such as you find on Regent Street or upper Broadway, that electric lights surround the cathedral, and that tram-cars run past it on rails sunk below the surface of the road way and over a better street than any to be found in New York city". As well as being like New York or London in comparison with Central America, Caracas was also "the Paris of South America" (Davis, 1896: 221, 237, 245-46). Even though this title originally belonged to Buenos Aires - as it still does - Davis's opinion had some echo in the English-speaking world, given that the author had written a book about Paris the year before. Though noticing the presence of Germans as wholesale dealers, Morris also confirmed the Parisian ethos of Crespo's Caracas: "What a foreigner first notices is the decidedly French air of the city. The very names above the shops and the signs naming the articles for sale are in French. French bonnets, gowns, neckwear, etc, adorn the shop windows". Furthermore, the cafés had adopted "the French custom of setting small tables on the broad sidewalks, where it is usual for persons to sit and read during the long days, sipping the different beverages of the country". By the turn of the new century, Scruggs still echoed Davis's impressions (Morris, 1897: 107-10; Scruggs, 1900: 205).

In addition to the Parisian-like image of street life, American visitors had long since recognized the influence of European civilization in the social and

cultural ethos of Caracas. With enough public show-places "to entertain a stranger for a fortnight", a highlight of Crespo's capital seemed to be the "performances by the very best opera troupes of Europe", which used to take place four nights a week during the "winter months" (Davis, 1896: 246; Scruggs, 1900: 218). The subsidized opera seasons dated back to Guzmanian times, when Curtis had already attended a presentation of *Robert Le Diable* which was "as well rendered as the average operatic performance in the United States" (1888: 271). More familiar than the Americans with the social language of European theatres, the Italian Tommaso Caivano obtained a more vivid insight into the Caraquenan bourgeoisie, when he attended a representation of Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* in Crespo's capital. Commending the "esecuzione veramente magistrale" given by the "buona compagnia italiana", Caivano was delighted with the décor of the Municipal theatre and the tropical refinement of the turnout:

"Il vero e più attraente spettacolo per noi, spettacolo del tutto nuovo e che pure ci richiamava qualche cosa alla memoria, che svegliava in noi liete e grate rimembranze che si andavano facendo gradatamente sempre più chiare e distinte, era la gran sala del teatro riccamente illuminata a luce elettrica da cima a fondo, dalla platea al loggione, svelta, allegra, elegante; era l'insime gaio e imponente di un pubblico numeroso il cui semplice aspetto esteriore bastava a far dichiarare sceltissimo; erano le due file di palchi et la sottostante galleria ad anfiteatro che tiene il posto abitualmente destinato al prim'ordine di quelli, dove non si scorgeva il più piccolo vuoto, dove dalla nostra poltrona di platea non vedevamo a primo colpo d'occhio che tre splendide riunioni, e diremmo quasi collezioni di bei visini bianchi ombreggiati da ricca e morbida capigliatura, dai grandi occhi neri che brillavano assai più dei diamanti delle loro acconciature... di tre lunghe file semicircolari di eleganti signore e signorine, la cui naturale bellezza, congiunta alla grazia tutta tropicale delle molli e delicate movenze, acquistava ancora nuovi e maggiori incanti fra la seta ed i ricami dei ricchi e vaporosi abbigliamenti, sotto il potenti fasci di luce del gran lampadario

centrale che scendava giù dal tetto e si allargava come sottile e distesa filigrana di acciaio brunito al disotto della gran volta, senza menomamente offendere le pupile degli spettatori." (Caivano, 1897: 231-32).

Caivano's vivid impressions of the Caraquenian *beau monde* were confirmed by the Colombian Julio Galofre, who thought that the lavish soirees in the Municipal were a mirage escaped from Aladdin's lamp. There was an Asian luxury not only in the theatre but in upper-class houses and all over the "metropolis", where a few pounds sterling could pay for "días venturosos que no tienen que envidiar á los de París" (1895: 229). Nor did Caracas have to envy the French capital its women. Following the Guzmanian visitors' recognition of the Paris-oriented vocation of their elegance, Caraquenian beauties had apparently achieved a higher degree of Europeanized distinction by Crespo's times. During his years as personal secretary to the president, the Colombian Díaz Guerra confirmed that the Creole belles - who allegedly combined Greek and Andalusian features - struck a balance between simplicity and good taste "que despertaría la envidia de la más refinada parisiense" (1954: 142-44).

If the sophistication of Caraquenian high streets had been somehow predictable since Lisboa's times, it was very difficult to imagine that the same streets were to be so highly praised forty years later by fellow-citizens of Sandford. Despite the *delpiniada*, the Frenchification of Crespo's Caracas apparently turned out to be more conspicuous than Guzmán's. But American travellers never forgot that the urban miracle of the capital was mainly due to "old Guzy" (Curtis, 1896: 153; Davis, 1896: 258; Scruggs, 1900: 211). In addition to merely confirming Curtis's impression that the Guzmanian city was "a sort of" one-story Paris, post-Guzmanian visitors proclaimed that Caracas was "the" Paris of South America - a title which the illustrious

American had always desired for his capital. When agonizing in Paris in 1899, Guzmán was probably unaware of the Americans' confirmation of his Frenchifying influence in the tropics.

8. As American visitors recognized, the Europeanism of late-nineteenth-century Caracas was certainly based on the Guzmanato's cultural seeds which had survived the *delpiniada*. With more than 122 schools and several specialized colleges and academies by the late 1880s, the educational service was "au niveau des principales villes européennes", at least according to French visitors (Cazeneuve and Haraine, 1888: 48). By those years, the city had 33 newspapers, some of them specializing in mercantile, scientific, artistic, religious and literary information. That journalistic vitality made possible the appearance of *El Cojo Ilustrado* (ECI) - a cultural fortnightly which nurtured and rallied the intelligentsia of Caracas and the Spanish-speaking world. From 1892 until 1915, ECI was to unfold the European-oriented agenda set up in Guzmanian times (Mijares, 1960: 157-58; Michelena, 1967: 86-87). In ECI were translated the literary novelties of Maupassant, Daudet, Mirbeau, France, Leopardi, D'Annunzio and Wilde; excerpts from Pérez Galdós's and Pardo Bazán's realism appeared, as well as fresh samples from Darfo's and Rodó's modernism. Besides embracing Mrs Guzmán Blanco's frivolous bequests, ECI also included, from the very first issues, serializations of Baroness Staffe's etiquette manuals, completed with pages on European fashion; in this section were advertised Parisian department stores, such as *La Belle Jardinière*, *Printemps*, *La Samaritaine* and *Au Bon Marché* - the latter offering to post catalogues to customers in Caracas. With all this paraphernalia, one can understand how Caraquenian belles could dazzle foreign visitors on their nights out.

In addition to Guzmán's legacy, Crespo's and Castro's Caracas exhibited features of a new urban culture. When arriving in the former's capital, Caivano immediately realized that Caracas was a product of the civilization elaborated "nella grande fucina europea in questa portentosa fine di secolo"; Savelli had the same impression of a city which offered "todos los goces de la civilización y del progreso" (Savelli, 1896: 624; Caivano, 1897: 203). By those years, horse races had become a fashionable hobby for the upper classes after the constitution of the Jockey Club de Venezuela and the launch of the Hipódromo de Sabana Grande, towards the east of the city. Apart from improving the breeding of horses, the Club was declared a symbol of "nuevas recreaciones sancionadas por las más avanzadas civilizaciones en los primeros países de Europa" (ECI, IV, 84, 15-VI-1895: 371). The racecourse also became a chic venue for the best Caraquenian society, especially for Creole "dandys", who used to wear their grey morning coats, as in "Long-Cham". And the European "chic" extended to the beach: Macuto became the favourite seaside resort, the Caraquenians' "San Sebastián" or "Biarritz" (ECI, XVI, 364, 15-II-1907: 137-44; García de la Concha, 1962: 117, 142-43). Those who were not invited to such exclusive venues could console themselves during Crespo's Carnivals, when Caraquenians boasted to have transplanted into their Avenida del Este the splendour that the festival used to have in the Via del Corso in Rome (ECI, IV, 77, 1-III-1895: 149). During the rest of the year, music lovers could enjoy opera highlights in the public galas performed in the Plaza Bolívar until Castro's times.

The elegant life of Castro's Caracas was not diminished by the Andean troops who had swarmed over the capital since the 1899 Revolución



Restauradora. Headed by Castro's aides-de-camp dressed in French outfits, the mountain soldiers thereafter escorted their caudillo to the endless parties and balls he was offered, where they could meet the sophisticated virgins of Caraquenian plutocracy. Then "El Cabito" amazed the stiff society of the capital with his abilities for dancing polkas, mazurkas and waltzes, "aunque los brincos que daba le quitaban un poco de prestancia" - as one of his soldiers recognized (Montilla, 1988: 145). After her husband's nocturnal bacchanalias with the virgins, Doña Zoila entertained Caraquenian señoras in "garden partys" served with meringues and patisserie, sorbets and ptisan that alleviated the sultry afternoon heat of that "diminuto París tropical" (Picón Salas, 1991: 287-91; 305-306). Labelled by visitors as "la ciudad de la gentileza", Castro's gay and frivolous capital had entered the so-called "bella época" - a period in which the cultural presence of Europe and the predominance of Paris were brought to a climax (Hernández, 1909: 130; García de la Concha, 1962: 217-29; Schael, 1966: 196-97; Cortina, 1971: 187-88; Muñoz, 1972: 9).

"Soria no dijo ni una palabra; pero en sus ojos había toda la tristeza del mundo. Y cuando muy tarde, esa noche, volvía a su casa, hallóse viendo y considerando, si no con verdadero odio, con algo muy parecido al odio verdadero, los hombres, las cosas, todo lo que aquella ciudad estrecha y mezquina, de conciencia, como sus calles, angosta y sucia."

Manuel Díaz Rodríguez, *Idolos rotos* (1901)

## ALBERTO SORIA'S DRAMA

9. If contemporary visitors to Caracas could breath its European air and the Americans could even feel as if in Paris, the natives who knew the original

models which Caracas tried to copy could never be so enraptured. The apparent modernity of the petty capital hid a backward reality which could not be ignored by truly cosmopolitan Caraqueñians - not, at least, with the same innocence or indulgence that short-term visitors could afford. The two visions were summarized by the half-American Thomas Russell Ybarra, whose fond memories of the 1890s Caracas in which he had been brought up could not wipe out the hidden reality of the same city which was praised by his fellow countrymen: "Though Richard Harding Davis called it the Paris of the South America, to the joy of the natives, many of whom love Paris better than salvation, it was primitive" (1942: 95). The capital of the politically unsettled country dragged along many aspects of its colonial backwardness which were not perceived by narrow-minded Caraqueñians, for whom the differences between Caracas and Paris never were significant. The gap, rather, was suffered by well-travelled and open-minded intellectuals, whose literary works gave life to diverse characters who would oppose the taboos of Crespo's and Castro's Caracas.

Miguel Eduardo Pardo's *Todo un pueblo* (1899) was one of the first novelistic portrayals of the false modernity of post-Guzmanian Caracas. Adopting the fictional name of "Villabrava" - in Venezuelan Castilian meaning "angry city" - Pardo satirized "una ciudad original, con puntas y ribetes de pueblo europeo, a pesar de sus calles estrechas y de sus casas rechonchas, llenas de flores y de moho". As well as being a cruel reminder of Caraqueñian provincialism, the ridiculous image of the obscure town pretending to be European was a mordant allusion to the failure of Guzmán's fiesta: "El modernismo le suprimió lo mejor de sus primitivas costumbres, para darle, en cambio, muchos de esos usos que la civilización decreta en todas partes". Although some Caraqueñians recognized *sotto*

voce that their city could never compete with the capital of the nineteenth century, most of them carried on with their Frenchified snobbery. These urban pretensions turned out to be pathetic in the so-called "clubs", "bulevares", "avenidas", "basílicas", "coliseos" and "palacios" of Villabrava, which were not only an unnecessary importation but also a poor imitation of their European counterparts - according to the novelist who lived in Madrid and Paris during the 1890s (Pardo, 1981: 52, 65).

Despite its Guzmanian make-up, the sham cosmopolitanism of Crespo's Caracas was immediately noticed by Alberto Soria - the protagonist of Manuel Díaz Rodríguez's *Idolos Rotos* (1901) - as soon as he got in touch with parochial Caraquenians after his long sojourn in Europe (1982: 23-24, 48-49). The case of the Creole snob disdaining Villabrava when returning from abroad had already appeared in Pardo's novel, as a way of portraying Caraquenians' frivolous and showy fashions after travelling (Pardo, 1981:31). Alberto therefore knew that the snobbish newly-arrived were dubbed "inconformes" in the city:

"Bien sé que esa palabreja no la emplean ahora aquí sino para designar a los que van a vivir durante algunos meses la vida de los bulevares y vuelven siguiendo escrupulosamente la moda, con la levita según el último patrón salido de Londres, con la corbata de David, el sombrero de Delion, el bastón cogido a la manera de los elegantes en la Avenida del Bois de Boulogne o bajo Las Acacias, algunas palabras francesas en los labios, y sobre todo, un contínuo echar de menos la superficialidad rica, dorada y boba de la vida parisiense" (Díaz Rodríguez, 1982: 30, 42).

Nevertheless, the young sculptor - who had won a prize in a Paris contest - claimed to his old friends that he deserved the label but in a more painful sense, since he was deeply alienated from Crespo's Caracas. He certainly

was, as the increasing conflict of Díaz Rodríguez's hero with his own country would demonstrate: following the interference in his private life by his narrow-minded acquaintances, the degeneration of his family because of corrupt politics and the final destruction of his works by Castro's primitive soldiers, the only solution was to be a definitive exile from the mean and vulgar capital.

10. The confrontation of provincials with Caraquenian frivolity and corruption can be regarded as variants of Alberto Soria's drama. Coming from her father's hacienda in the Venezuelan plains, Chucha Gárate was dazzled when she entered Crespo's capital, packed with placards of sophisticated shops headed by *La Compagnie Française*, which always featured "las últimas novedades de París". At the same time, the newcomer was surprised at the showy and faddish attitude of some "Caraqueñitos": even without having been abroad, they talked all the time about "el último espectáculo, la última noticia de Europa, el último escándalo de la ciudad, con la frase de moda, ya elaborada cuidadosamente por estos caraqueñitos sin corazón y sin bondad, repletos de novelas francesas". Led by Elisa Probate de Gárate - the smart wife of Chucha's uncle, one of Crespo's ministers - they complained that outside of the capital it was impossible to find English soup, Henessy brandy or the glamorous clothes of Caraquenian shops. Thus opposing her petty Paris to Venezuela's backward province, Elisa exclaimed: "¡de Caracas al cielo...!", while she touched up the carmine of her lips. Following aunt Elisa's suggestions, Chucha contracted the services of the *modiste* of *La Compagnie*; the candid niece thereafter yielded more and more to the apparent importance of the "cosas doradas" of a civilization which started to wipe out her natural simplicity (Pocaterra, 1990: 84-85, 90-

92, 111-17, 131, 152). Chucha finally metamorphosed into one of those Caraquenian belles described by Caivano - she even attended the / *Pagliacci* galas at the Municipal opera house in those years. But the fatal disenchantment of Pocaterra's heroine would take place back in the province, when her naive feelings were rejected and her romantic letters mocked by her cousin from the capital. Then the parson of her village would publicly blame Chucha for not attending the church after her season in the Venezuelan Sodom - which God had refrained from destroying, solely out of respect for the Archbishop's prayers. Perhaps Chucha had certainly been converted into one of Justo's freethinkers: secular women intoxicated by their reading of Renan's works and Zola's novels (Sales Pérez, 1902: 258; Pocaterra, 1990: 233).

More astute and persistent were some other provincials who arrived in the Caracas of Pío Gil's *El Cabito* (1909). Following the Venezuelans' apelike instinct - "que nos convierte en monos imitadores lo mismo del más fino *gentleman* británico que del más vulgar torero español" - the Montálvez family had rapidly become *rastaquouères* when they moved into Crespo's capital. Doña Elvira then tried to copy "esa elegancia de segunda mano, ese buen tono postizo que adquieren las provincianas que vienen a Caracas o las caraqueñas que van a Europa, con las cuales unas y otras pretenden humillar a sus paisanas cuando tornan a la parroquia o regresan a la capital". Her sons wore binoculars when they attended the small Hipódromo de Sabana Grande, just because they were used on Parisian racecourses. In their own desperate race for social advancement, the Montálvez family hosted "garden partys" and poker every Tuesday for their Caraquenian acquaintances - always reluctant to accept the newcomers. When the household was on the brink of bankruptcy, the glamorous excuse of a

journey to Europe could socially justify the sale of family assets, especially in a capital where pawnbrokers flourished (Sales Pérez, 1901: 253-56; Gil, 1978: 115-16, 136-43).

But the astute clan finally managed to learn the obscure lessons of Caraquenian politics, and "General" Montálvez was to become one of the best procurers for El Cabito's harem. When the latter chose a certain Teresa as the next object of his lasciviousness, Montálvez helped to stalk the new prey; the city-born, lower-class victim thereby took over from the provincials. Castro's bawds took her to *La Compagnie, Liverpool* and other exclusive shops, where Teresa was shown all the lavish goods she could have access to, had the young teacher volunteered to be El Cabito's mistress (Gil, 1978: 235-38). After an endless harassment which also victimized her fiancé and both their families, the heroine surrendered her virtue to the satyr - an immolation which was soon followed by her death in a convent. There was no room for moral hope in Gil's critique of Castro's Caracas.

11. In parallel with the afflictions of their urban personae in the Caracas of Crespo and Castro, the myths of foreign metropolises were widely discussed by literary authors of Venezuelan *costumbrismo* and modernism. Caraquenians' worship of Paris had especially been fuelled since the first decade of ECI, with Domínguez's, Bonafoux's and Pardo's fortnightly reports on cultural life in the Beaux-Arts capital. From the Mecca of Western civilization, the priests of that cult confirmed to their remote countrymen that the Arc du Triumph epitomized the supremacy of Parisian wonders over other capitals: "Ni Roma, ni Berlín, ni Londres, ni New York, ni St. Petersburgo, ni Madrid tienen *nada semejante*; aquello es *único* " (ECI, V, 86,15-VII-1895: 436).

The young readers of ECI were thus given solid grounds to convert their Parisian dreams into an obsession: Teresa Faría - Alberto Soria's mistress - "al igual que tantos otros que no traspusieron jamás los límites de su patria, se representaba a París como el más acabado resumen de cuantas delicias y primores abarca el universo" (Díaz Rodríguez, 1982: 132-33). For the same reasons, as soon as Fermín Entrena arrived for the first time in Europe as Castro's consul to Antwerp, Montilla's hero had to pay tribute to the *belle-époque* capital: "Era el París del deleite y del dolor, del pecado y del lujo, en ese comienzo de siglo, y el cual era como un imán para el hombre de toda la tierra... Ese tributo a París pagado antes de ir a cualquier punto de Europa, era algo imperativo y justificable para todos los hombres de la tierra" (Montilla, 1988: 375-76).

Though different from chic Paris, New York headed the group of North American metropolises which started to be venerated by Caraqueñians. From the earliest years of ECI, the "Crónicas Yankees" and the "Escenas Neoyorkinas" had commented profusely on the New York skyscrapers or the 1893 Chicago Exhibition as astounding expressions of the American Babel (ECI, II, 39, 1-VIII-1893: 272-73). According to Pocaterra's satiric portraits, Crespo's snobbish ministers already boasted of having been trained during short trips to New York; though Bolet Peraza's "Silvestre Montañez" - the incarnation of Venezuelan provincialism - still found himself lost in the Yankee Babylon (Bolet Peraza, 1931: 219-63; Pocaterra, 1990: 57). Nevertheless, the American metropolises lacked Parisian glamour: when Pardo visited New York, he reported to ECI readers that he had dined with a Yankee lady whose greatest frustration was "no haber nacido francesa" (1892: 297).

Because of its pernicious effects, the addiction to Paris started to be denounced in some of the *costumbristas'* works. After a few years studying in "la metrópoli del Universo", young Venezuelan "doctors" who returned to the country could not stand the vulgar expressions of their native towns, nor the flimsy modernity of Caracas, according to Justo's forecast of Alberto Soria's syndrome (Sales Pérez, 1903: 19-20). Although Pardo initially disregarded this syndrome and pointed at the equivalent dangers looming in other metropolises, after the Dreyfuss affair the disappointed journalist condemned his past addiction to the Third-Republic capital: "Ojalá fuera aún dueño de aquellas frases atrevidas, de aquella literatura desaliñada y loca que gasté hablando al periodismo americano de París, de París artístico, de París industrial, de París alegre, de París trabajador. Hasta del París triste y enfermo hice yo un París regocijado y bello" (Pardo, 1897: 314; 1898: 648). Based on his own experience in the vicious capital, the Parisian dogma was similarly questioned by one of Alberto Soria's friends, who thought Paris was the metropolis of bad influences over Latins:

"Con los daños cada vez mayores del cosmopolitismo en su país, y quizá en todos los pueblos de la tierra latinoamericana, era posible hacer un gran volumen, al cual se diese por solo título *París*, porque si alguna otra ciudad europea y alguna de la América sajona ejercen, al igual de París, grande influencia nociva en el desarrollo y costumbre de aquellos pueblos, París, que en el mal, en los vicios y en la seducción comprendía a todas las ciudades, había de compendiarlas, así como en la culpa, en el reproche." (Díaz Rodríguez, 1982: 94).

As a less accusatory and more positive reaction to the spell of foreign metropolises, other characters started to reaffirm Caracas as their dearest reality. That happened for the first time to the elderly pensioner of Tosta García's *Don Secundino en París* (1894), who returned to Caracas in



nostalgic mood after having experienced the ephemeral pleasures of the world capital. In the case of Coll's "Gente de Caracas" (1902) who had lived in the French capital, the kindness of their native city prevailed over their nostalgia for Paris, once the clothes they had brought from the latter were worn out and out-of-date. However - let us remark the difference - Caraquenians who had lived in New York kept their hasty routine and materialistic philosophy: "*time is money*" (1980: 418-19). Some years later, the young women of Rufino Blanco Fombona's *El hombre de hierro* (1907) confirmed their vernacular apostasy from the Parisian dogma: walking across Caracas in the cool dawn, they proudly reaffirmed their belonging to "aquella población chata, como una ciudad griega; pintoresca, como una ciudad árabe" (1988: 32).

Always yearning for the metropolises they had lived in or read about, the personae of the "ciudad del modernismo" displayed in different ways an urban obsession which was to persist throughout the *belle époque*: their search for a city which could fulfil their desires. Despite some characters' plea for Caracas, most of the modernists tried to solve that conflict by escaping to Europe (Picón Salas, 1984: 149-50; Rama, 1984: 115-16). Elisa de Gárate did so when her husband's ministry was uncertain, and she implored him to ask the government for a "chic" consulate in Europe (Pocaterra, 1990: 211). So did Fermín Entrena when Castro's administration did not fulfil his expectations, and an old friend reminded him that "we" Venezuelans "*vivíamos en tinieblas mientras no viéramos la vieja civilización*" (Montilla, 1988: 372). For more frivolous reasons, the same conclusion was endorsed by the fashionable "dandys" invited to the Montálvez family ball: having compared the up-to-dateness of tailors from Berlin, London and Paris, the beaux seriously asserted that it was necessary

"haber conocido muy de cerca la civilización europea para comprender el atraso de Venezuela" (Gil, 1978: 180). With his definitive exile from the spurious civilization of Caracas, Alberto Soria had taken the modernists' escapism to its extreme. But Alberto's drama was far from being solved in Venezuelan literature: young intellectuals and cosmopolitans returning from Europe would have to come to terms with Caraquenian parochialism till the end of the "bella época" - as we shall see.

"Llegado a la cumbre del paseo, buscó los mejores puntos de vista, y desde ahí se entretenía en descubrir con la mirada, nombrándolos a un mismo tiempo, los edificios más notables: el Teatro Municipal; cerca del teatro, una iglesia a la manera de Bizancio, coronada de cúpulas; la Plaza de Toros, la Catedral; la iglesia de La Pastora y demás templos, casi todos de arquitectura mediocre ... Hacia el Noroeste le pareció ver todo un barrio nuevo, como si la ciudad, en este punto, se hubiera ensanchado bruscamente: casas construídas y casas a medio construir sobre una tierra color de ocre, algunos dispersos manchones de arboledas y muchas calles, apenas en esbozo, rompídas de barrancos."

M. Díaz Rodríguez, *Idolos rotos* (1901)

## A VIEW FROM EL CALVARIO

12. Remembering his ascents along Florence's Viale dei Colli and the Roman Pincio, one afternoon Alberto Soria climbed the Paseo El Calvario in order to get a panoramic view of post-Guzmanian Caracas. Although most of what Alberto saw was the skyline resulting from Guzmán's fiesta, certain ameliorations had been introduced in the streets of Crespo's Caracas, which could not be perceived from the hill. For instance, the dust which had floated over the city since the Septenio - which even made Méndez y Mendoza jibe that Caraquenians looked as blond as Berliners - had abated by the end of the century due to a new street-watering system; later on, traditional types of paving stones in the main streets were to be replaced by concrete surfaces

(Méndez y Mendoza, 1893: 112-13; GDF, *Memoria*, 1889: vii). Following the Guzmanian tradition, public spaces were also kept clean: if the French travellers were very pleased with the maintenance of promenades and public gardens immediately after Guzmán's departure, so were the Anglo-Saxons with the streets and buildings almost ten years later (Cazeneuve and Haraine, 1888: 64; Wood, 1896: 177-78; Morris, 1897: 108).

Regarding other urban services, there was still a huge gap between Caracas and the progress of industrial metropolises reported in ECI. Crespo's capital only had 81 electric lights, 1,055 public gas-lamps and 632 of kerosene - still very far from the 53,000 public lamps which made of Paris a city "espléndidamente iluminada" (ECI, IV, 82, 15-V-1895: 303). Although gas lights would be usual in Caracas until the turn of the twentieth century, electric lights started to be more widely diffused from the mid-1890s, with the creation of the Electricidad de Caracas and a new hydroelectric plant devised with French technology. At the same time, the illumination of some Caraquenian monuments was entrusted to a New York-based company (GDF, *Memoria*, 1894: 389-99; López de Ceballos, 1953: 402). With scarcely more than 2,000 telephone lines by the turn of the new century, Caracas was very much behind the standards for this service in Stockholm, San Francisco, New York, Paris and London, listed by ECI as the best communicated capitals of the world (ECI, XI, 263, 1-XII-1902: 746; Troconis, 1993: 208).

In relation to public transport, some of the elegant facilities introduced by Guzmán were kept until the time of Castro's Caracas. Morris found that many of the private carriages were "made in France, usually built in the style of our victorias, and are certainly good looking"; both victorias and chaises would

remain as distinctive for upper-class Caraqueñians throughout most of the *belle époque* (Morris, 1897: 111; García de la Concha, 1962: 172). The Guzmanian lines of horse-drawn trams were also working till the 1900s, but they were often derailed and their narrow benches seemed to have been designed only for slim passengers (Méndez y Mendoza, 1894: 417-18; Ramos y García, 1901: 81-84). This is why entrepreneurs such as Nicomedes Zuloaga and Edgar Wallis decided to look for European capital in order to electrify the trams, which started in 1908 with a float of 40 English carriages. Many years after the “elegantes y cómodos” electric trams of Le Havre were described and the first failures of the New York trams were reported in ECI, the Tranvías Eléctricos de Caracas finally represented “un progreso efectivo en el ornato y en la comodidad del tráfico de la capital” (ECI, IV, 79, 1-IV-1895: 205; 80: 15-IV-1895: 239; 84: 15-VI-1895: 375; XVII, 397, 1-VII-1908: 399; *Digesto Municipal*, 1939: 39-43). Despite the delay, some candid Caraqueñians then believed that their city boasted an exclusive device which definitely ranked it among the great capitals of the world (Cortina, 1975: 12; Misle, 1981: 74-76).

13. Although Alberto mainly pinpointed major Guzmanian buildings, there were other architectural innovations in Crespo's Caracas. On the academic level, from 1895 architecture was incorporated as a two-year programme of the newly created Escuela de Ingeniería, sponsored by the CIV; this programme had to be completed with one year at the Academia de Bellas Artes. The technical training of young professionals could be reinforced at the Sociedad de Arquitectura y Construcción, which was also new and exchanged information with the Société Centrale d'Architectes Françaises (Caraballo, 1986: 59-67). In relation to new monuments, Crespo's major

present to the capital was the construction of two palaces: the Palacio de Miraflores, which came to be the government headquarters, and the Palacete de Santa Inés, devoted to the General's wife. In 1895 Hurtado Manrique also built the Arco de la Federación with the assistance of Alejandro Chataing - a young architect who had won a public contest to design the new façade of the San Jacinto market the year before. Jointly with Paris-educated Antonio Malaussena - favourite of Andueza Palacio's administration (1890-92) - Chataing was thereafter responsible for continuing Hurtado's Beaux-Arts eclecticism in the public architecture of Crespo's and Castro's Caracas (Gasparini, 1978: 274). Here he spread "preciosos retazos del Renacimiento Francés de la hornada de la Exposición de París del 1900, del Grand y Petit Palais, el Arco Alejandro III, cuyos pilones ornamentales hacen su remedo en los minaretes del Teatro Nacional de los Cipreses" (Seijas Cook, 1936: 325). Launched by Castro in 1905 as an emulation of Guzmán's Municipal theatre, the Nacional had an opening gala which included the Spanish operetta *El relámpago* and the ballet *El señorito y la maja* (Salas, 1974: 81).

Malaussena's and Chataing's eclecticism was exhibited in many of the new *quintas* (villas) of the *urbanización* El Paraíso - the first bourgeois area which had budded southwest of the traditional centre, in the grounds of a former hacienda bought by the developers of trams. Since the mid-1890s, "Ciudad Nueva" - as the suburb was originally called - was meant to be a high-standing residential area, with modern networks of services such as water supply, sewers and electricity, and an innovative lay-out of greenery and squares. The development was speeded up by the 1900 earthquake, when bourgeois families decided to build prefabricated houses imported from England and the United States by the engineers Alberto Smith and

Roberto García (Schael, 1968: 12; Núñez, 1988: 255; Troconis, 1993: 190). The new *quintas* offered Chataing and other architects the opportunity to display their architecture “ostentosa pero nunca frívola”, epitomized by Castro’s “Villa Zoila” - with a touch of Chinese pagoda and ample gardens where the First Lady hosted the aforementioned parties for her friends. Once his villa was finished in 1904, Castro was driven everyday from El Paraíso to Miraflores by his French chauffeur in Doña Zoila’s car imported from Paris - the first automobile to traverse Caraquenian streets (Posani, 1969: 267-71, 288; Schael, 1969: 45; Vera, 1995: 79).

When Caivano visited the Avenida de El Paraíso in the 1890s, he already found that the “viale” of the developing area was “assai ben costruito, con belli marciapiedi da entrambi i lati”, which should turn the avenue into “uno dei più belli e incantevoli passeggi dell’America Latina” - comparable with La Reforma in Mexico City or Palermo in Buenos Aires (1897: 249-50). Touring Caracas by car in the late 1900s, the Colombian Pedro A. Peña was able to confirm Caivano’s forecast: the Paseo de El Paraíso had certainly become “el rendez-vous de las elegancias caraqueñas, con sus alamedas frondosas, sus palacios magníficos, sus quintas primorosas y sus graciosos chalets”. In addition to the monuments inherited from the Guzmanian era, the splendour of areas like El Paraíso reaffirmed that Caracas was “superior a Bogotá en lo material” (1954: 142-44). But not all visitors endorsed this alleged superiority: another Brazilian minister to Venezuela insisted that Caracas was still a capital without true palaces, where “templos sin nobleza” were transformed into civic pantheons - thus slashing at Chataing’s late renewal of the Panteón Nacional (Oliveira Lima, 1981: 95-96). Alberto would probably have agreed with the minister.

14. The northwestward expansion noticed by Alberto was La Pastora - a steep area of Crespo's and Castro's Caracas, which sheltered the humble victims of *El Cabito* and other working-class families. As in northern San José, a more vernacular type of housing was emerging in these incipient suburbs, different from the exotic *quintas* of El Paraíso - a variety which mirrored the social segregation which started to take place around the traditional centre. Since Crespo's administration, there had been a few attempts to build low-cost housing, basically through contracts between the MOP and private developers, in which the latter were exempted from the importation tax for construction materials (MOP, *Memoria*, 1896, I: xvii-xviii). The mechanism apparently became commonplace in Castro's Caracas, since some characters of Blanco Fombona and Gil were trapped in obscure deals related to the lucrative business. Although Federico Bauder had submitted a project for a Banco Nacional Hipotecario de Fincas Urbanas in 1899, the construction of economic houses did not turn out to attract major entrepreneurs in the new century. The landowners of central Caracas preferred to maintain their estates under the profitable hovelling of so-called "corralones", where tenants were provided minimum conditions of space and facilities (Acosta Saignes, 1967: 771-73; Cortina, 1971: 139-40).

The residential exodus of traditional groups mirrored a first shortage of housing in central Caracas, which certainly started to congest with commercial activities and immigrants. The 1891 Pasaje Linares and Malaussena's Pasaje Ramella - where Teresa was accompanied by Castro's madams - were the main examples of new European-like arcades, which combined Frenchified shops and Turkish peddlers. These were so abundant that Justo had complained that central groves were being

converted into a Cairo market (Sales Pérez, 1902: 174; Schael, 1978: 88; Misle, 1981: 41). As well as the Turks, 9,669 foreigners among a DF population of 98,321 already evinced an unprecedented amount of immigration in 1890s Caracas. Posh tourists could certainly choose among the top hotels of the capital, such as the *Saint Amand*, *Klindt*, *Paris*, *Francia* or *Filadelfia* - some of them featuring European-like cafés in the grounds (*Tercer Censo*, 1891, I: 113, 158). But humble newcomers often had to remain in the aforementioned “corralones” in the centre, where the Spaniard Ramos y García came across scenes worthy of Pérez Galdós’s Madrid:

“Al lado de un español rancio que llora la pérdida de nuestras colonias, vive tranquilo un *yankee* imperialista en compañía de un puertorriqueño, ambos camiseros, por más señas. En el cuarto inmediato se alberga un francés que departe amistosamente con el español ... Junto á un súbdito de Humberto I se hospeda un adepto de Confucio” (Ramos y García, 1901: 31-36).

All of these spatial changes were taking place in the Caracas of Crespo and Castro. Nevertheless, they did not seem to be enough for Alberto Soria’s expectations, at least when those changes were compared with Guzmán’s past additions. But a major revolution was certainly taking place in Alberto’s capital, although it could not be perceived at first sight in the streets, and even less from the heights of El Calvario: it had to do with the discussion and reform of the public hygiene of Caracas.



"Caracas no es una verdadera ciudad, porque carece de las condiciones indispensables que hoy se exigen a las ciudades civilizadas; es decir le faltan elementos materiales de los cuales no se puede prescindir, para que la vida sea cómoda y el desarrollo de la sociedad sea normal".

Luis Razetti, "Por Caracas" (1909)

## BETWEEN URBAN POLICING AND PUBLIC HYGIENE

15. In spite of the appraisal by visitors like Urdaneta, the question of urban "hygiene" had not really arisen in Guzmanian society. The "public salubrity" was only weakly controlled in Section II of the 1871 *Ordenanza*; instead, most of the concern was addressed to "cleanliness" and "appearance" - as has already been explained (arts. 13-25, CMDF, *Ordenanzas*, 1876: 10-12). José Manuel de los Ríos's *Tratado Elemental de Higiene* (1874) had certainly alerted people to the dirtiness of the streets of Caracas; but in many aspects still closer to the etiquette manuals of pre-Guzmanian times, the treatise only distinguished between "public" and "private hygiene", without explicitly referring to urban problems (1874: 2, 19). Another general distinction between "accidental" and "relative insalubrity" was hinted at by Toribio González, when answering those criticisms of the dirty Caraquénian streets (GO, 1-X-1874). Some years later, Rafael Villavicencio's *La República de Venezuela bajo el punto de vista de la Geografía y Topografía médicas y de la Demografía* (1880) - specially prepared for the Exposición - devoted a whole chapter to Caracas; though the author there recognized some problems in the "public cleanliness" of Caraquénian houses, he gave a positive assessment of the overall "salubrity" of the festive capital (1880: 111, 122-23).

During the 1880s, Venezuela attended international events concerning sanitary norms (Washington, 1881), cholera (Rome, 1885) and hygiene and

demography (Paris, 1889). But the real concern over the hygienical question was to begin in the next decade, with the "renaissance" of Venezuelan medicine which was to occur at different levels up to the 1910s. Following the example of the Hôpital Cariboissiere in Paris, the launch of the Hospital Vargas (1891) opened a new period of medical education in Venezuela. At the same time, after his studies in Paris (1889-91), José Gregorio Hernández went back to Crespo's country with Louis Pasteur's discoveries, and proclaimed them to his sceptical colleagues at the Escuela Médica and the Unión Médica, which had been constituted in Guzmanian times (Perera, 1951: 185, 224-25; Archila, 1952: 45; 1956, I: 257). Further returners boosted new professional breakthroughs. After his 3-year course in Paris (1890-92), Luis Razetti created, with Francisco Rísquez, the Sociedad de Médicos y Cirujanos de Caracas (1893), which published the fortnightly *Gaceta Médica de Caracas* (GMC) from the same year. In 1895, they helped to found the Cruz Roja Venezolana and the Instituto Pasteur of Caracas - the creation of which was speeded up by an outbreak of dysentery and ECI's claims that "casi todas las capitales de Europa y muchas de América" boasted establishments of that kind (ECI, IV, 74, 15-I-1895: 48; 83, 1-VI-1895: 335). The new century was to open with the foundation of the Colegio de Médicos de Venezuela (1902) and the later Academia Venezolana de Medicina (1904).

The medical renaissance was epitomized by the increasing divulgence of the wonders of Hygiene - the latest parameter of progress and civilization coming from Europe. ECI's early miscellanea already mirrored the hygienical concern in 1890s Venezuela: Pasteur's and Von Ringer's new methods of disinfection were translated from *La Nature* and *Le Concours Medical*; in the fashion pages, Baroness Staffe's *El Tocador* - a sort of

etiquette manual for the Crespo society - devoted long chapters to the cleaning of furniture and rooms (ECI, I, 10, 15-V-1892: 152; IV, 74, 15-I-1895: 44). From Madrid - where he was sent as Venezuelan consul in 1900 - Rísquez reported "limpieza" as the basic principle of preventive hygiene in Europe: cleanliness from the ground and the air to houses and streets; from water to the nourishment of bodies and souls (1903: 98). In a lecture delivered on the occasion of his joining the Colegio de Médicos in 1904, Arturo Ayala summarized the new equation of the opening century: "los progresos de la civilización son progresos de la higiene"; therefore, as in Disraeli's Britain, "el grado de civilización de un pueblo puede medirse por el empeño que tomen sus gobernantes en mejorar su estado sanitario" (1904: 5-6).

Disraeli's example was to be praised repeatedly by Razetti in the national newspapers during Castro's times. The follower of Ernst and Villavicencio not only commented on the evolutionism of Darwin and Haeckel, but also deciphered the findings of Pasteur, Koch, Von Behring, Metchnikoff, Ramón y Cajal and Monlau. Backed by his personal friendship with Castro - always impressionable to the fetishes of Science and Progress - Razetti established another hygienical equation for the sophisticated audience of the *belle époque*: "No es civilizado el país que no observa las reglas de la Higiene, como no es persona decente el individuo que no se baña diariamente" (1952, II: 171, 569-74, 595; Picón Salas, 1991: 139, 298). Even by the late 1900s, the European paternity of the new "social religion" was still being confirmed by Pedro José Rojas, when commenting on the bounties of the Public Health Act in England and the practical benefits of urban hygiene in the Old World (1911: 303).

16. In addition to the theoretical report on Europe's new hygienical religion, there was a catalyst which accelerated sanitary concern in Crespo's and Castro's society: Caracas was not such a healthy city as the Guzmanians thought it to be. The demographic increase was meagre: the urban population had only grown from 55,638 in 1881 to 72,429 in 1891, according to the census (*Tercer Censo*, 1891, I: 115). Although Caracas obviously was a small city which had barely started to trespass its colonial boundaries, there certainly was a problem: with 46,410, 53,801 and 57,059 deaths in 1894, 1906 and 1908, respectively, the high mortality-rate nullified the positive rate of population growth - as happened in the rest of the country. The gloomy panorama of the capital was aggravated by the 1900 earthquake (Razetti, 1952, II: 167; Troconis, 1993: 198-99). The debate around the whole problem was to be a simultaneous counterpoint between medical pronouncements and governmental measures - even though the protagonists on both sides were sometimes the same persons. In order to distinguish the role performed by each sector, let us start with the scientific report on the mortality syndrome in the city, so that we may continue afterwards with the administrative and legal changes which followed.

Villavicencio had not apparently paid much attention to the Caracas mortality as a demographic index: he had ultimately identified insufficiency of nourishment and the abuse of medicines as the major causes of urban deaths (1880: 120-23, 129). Nevertheless, new generations of hygiene-conscious Caraqueñians did notice the problem and prompted explanations and actions. From his fortnightly "Revista" in ECI, Méndez y Mendoza made use of the outbreaks of fever in the mid-1890s in order to censure doctors and authorities concerning the "pésimo estado sanitario de Caracas" (1893:

152). Some years later, Elías Toro's fortnightly "Crónica Científica" in ECI pointed to the necessity of keeping official figures consecutively, so that the true reasons for the appalling mortality-rate of the Venezuelan capital could be brought to light. This necessity was underlined by ECI's reports on the records of "movimiento de la población" followed by the sanitary office of New York (Toro, 1896: 721; ECI, VII, 146, 15-I-1898: 87-88).

The claims of the ECI reporters were apparently read by Venezuelan doctors, who were to debate diverse causes of the capital syndrome from the GMC and other publications. On the one hand, Caracas had too high a rate of mortality through tuberculosis, a fact which came out in one of the first issues of the "Crónicas" - the urban demographic statistics which Antonio Herrera Vegas was to publish periodically in the GMC from 1901. It was outrageous that tuberculosis casualties in Caracas were comparable to more populous cities of the world

"donde la parte proletaria de la población vive en peores condiciones de higiene que la nuestra, puesto que á aquellos les falta el agua y la luz, viviendo hacinados en horribles caserones, que más parecen pueblos que familias, donde el pan hace solo apariciones de cuando en cuando y a períodos no muy aproximados." (Herrera Vegas, 1901: 109).

Medical reaction in this respect was to be boosted by Razetti's national crusade after his appointment as a senior member of international leagues against tuberculosis and alcoholism. Even by 1909, tuberculosis rates in Caracas were not only comparable to but even higher than in London, "la ciudad más populosa del mundo", and Cracow, the most devastated by the disease in Europe (Archila, 1952: 152-53; Razetti, 1952, II: 168).

On the other hand, there was the problem of water-borne diseases, apparently due to the faulty supply and purification of water in the major Venezuelan cities. By 1890, there only were 2,870 water-provided houses in Caracas, among a total of 13,349 (*Tercer Censo*, 1891, I: 114-15). The DF government then signed a contract with Germán Jiménez to build and manage networks of drinking water and sewers; but the *Compañía General de las Aguas de Caracas* gave the concession back to the government, and the service thereafter swayed between the GDF and the CMDF (*Digesto*, 1939: 325-26). Meanwhile, the French discoveries concerning the bacillus of typhoid fever were commented on in ECI, which later denounced the defective purification of water as the main cause of that disease in Caracas (ECI, I, 1, 1-I-1892: 11; VIII, 150, 15-III-1895: 289). In an early article which appeared in the GMC - "Influencia de la purificación del agua en la salubridad" (1897) - E. Andrade Penny also looked towards water in order to explain the paradox of the high mortality-rates of Caracas and Maracaibo, which exceeded those of London and the major European and American cities, despite the latter's enormous rates of crime and accidents. Explaining the effectiveness of water purification for combating typhoid, dysentery and other digestive diseases, Andrade expected that the progressive authorities would realize the absolute necessity of establishing a proper system of water purification in the major Venezuelan cities. A good example to imitate might be the system of Berlin, whose recent improvements were reported in ECI two years later (Andrade, 1897: 50; ECI, VIII, 179, 1-VI-1899: 388).

17. Linking the two major causes of mortality in the capital - namely tuberculosis and water-borne diseases - in 1903 Razetti took the discussion to the newspapers: "Caracas se despuebla, no como se despuebla Francia,

porque su natalidad es exígua, sino porque la mortalidad es ya aterradora y va en aumento. Nuestro cálculo de julio de 1902 nos dió 35 por mil; el actual dá 38!". Razetti thus put together the main causes and the solution of the problem: the mortality was due to digestive diseases, tuberculosis and other maladies which were avoidable with programmes of both public and private hygiene, like those implemented in Havana, which had reduced mortality to 14x1000 (1952, II: 163). On the eve of the 1911 celebrations for the Centenary of the Declaration of Independence, Razetti still insisted that Caracas needed to reduce its mortality-rate to less than 20x1000 in order to become "una ciudad completa"; this target entailed solving the problems of water supply and sewers, among others (1952, II: 577).

The problem of the Caracas sewage had certainly been dragged along since Guzmanian times. There had been some ameliorations by the late 1880s, including the proposal of a new system by M. F. Herrera Tovar and H. Jiménez, submitted to the GDF without apparent effects. The outdated network was more congested towards the end of the century, since Caraquenians got used to throwing garbage into the public sewers, which reduced their capacity even more (GDF, *Memoria*, 1890: 487-97; 1899: 442-43). This "defectuoso sistema de cloacas" was pointed out by Toro as a partial cause of malaria in Caracas, whilst ECI's readers were told about the Sunday strolls that Parisians could enjoy in Acheres - the clean town which their refurbished sewers flowed into (Toro, 1896: 671; ECI, VII, 160, 15-VIII-1898: 595). By the turn of the century, Ayala included the sewage problem among the main *Causas que contribuyen a la mortalidad en Caracas y medidas que tienden a combatirlas* (1904), urging the authorities to imitate the example of the Paris system. The new member of the Academia de Medicina also referred to the importance given by the UK General Board of

Health to the water supply as the main component of urban salubrity; quoting the French biologist Dominique-François Arago, Ayala remarked that water for the city's consumption should be like Caesar's woman: "insospechable" (1904: 41, 61).

Francisco Rísquez also championed the water crusade from Spain. As Venezuelan consul in a country which suffered the highest mortality of Europe, and relying on French demographer Jacques Bertillon's analysis, Rísquez became familiarized with the hygienical problems of Spain - which was then trying to imitate European countries with more advanced sanitary policies. The medical consul also got acquainted with the agenda of the 1907 Congress of Hygiene and Demography, which took place in Berlin (1909: 89-90, 203). Looking at Caracas in perspective, he summarized his vision of the water problem in "Causas del predominio de las enfermedades gastro-intestinales en Caracas" (1907). Having confirmed his colleagues' conclusions that "las aguas de Caracas ofrecen todas las condiciones necesarias para causar enfermedades gastro-intestinales y muchas otras", Rísquez focused on the priority of improving the water supply and the sewage network: "El grande, colosal sin duda, pero indispensable empeño que hemos de realizar en Caracas ... es surtir de agua pura y ampliar su red de cloacas. Tal es la base de toda tentativa higiénica, sin la cual, cualesquiera otras resultarían lastimosamente inútiles" (1909: 168).

There were certainly other constraints in the urban infrastructure of Caracas, such as the problem of providing appropriate conditions for the storage of food stocks. In this respect, Méndez y Mendoza had already questioned in ECI the inspection of the conditions in which meat was kept in Crespo's refurbished markets, by contrast with the controls applied in Bogotá (1894:



119). Foreign visitors disregarded the problem and the Colombian even insisted that the Caracas market had “de sobra lo que le falta al mercado de Bogotá: amplitud, comodidad, elegancia y, sobre todo, aseo, mucho aseo” (Ramos y García, 1901: 139-44; Peña, 1954: 142). But Rísquez still thought that the unsatisfactory storage of comestibles in Caracas had direct consequences on digestive diseases, and the problem was yet another manifestation of the backward hygiene in Castro’s growing capital:

“...Caracas, con exigencias de ciudad populosa, sin todas las prácticas de la industria moderna; Caracas, que representa hoy esa etapa natural por donde han pasado todas las urbes que abandonan la salubridad campestre, para infestarse con las horrruras de la metrópoli que llega, antes de poseer los correctivos de una higienización adecuada; Caracas ha de sentir necesariamente, con mayor fuerza que el resto de la nación, los efectos de tales causas sobre la salud colectiva, determinados en primer término por el aparato que representa la caldera de la máquina humana.” (Rísquez, 1909: 164).

Rísquez thus summarized the syndrome of a city which aspired to be “metropolis” without having either solved the causes of rural mortality, or adopted the hygienic devices provided by modern industry. These were the same conclusions reached by Razetti when explaining the infrastructure required to solve the mortality syndrome in Castro’s capital: Caracas was far from being a complete city. From different perspectives, the champions of Venezuela’s medical renaissance agreed with Alberto Soria and his cosmopolitan friends.

18. Caracas also suffered the mortality syndrome due to the plagues which endemically and epidemically affected the entire country. Between the

1880s and 1920s, Venezuela presented particular problems with tropical diseases which were endemic in Latin America, such as amoebic dysentery, malaria, hookworm and yellow fever (Wilson, 1972: 355-56). Following an 1899 outbreak of variola, yellow fever also seized the Venezuelan capital in the same year as the international blockade; this fatal coincidence was then described with patriotic grief and outrage by Herrera Vegas, recently appointed as GDF's Inspector de Higiene:

"El año que acaba de transcurrir fué para nosotros lo que aquel que Víctor Hugo calificó para Francia de *año terrible*. Inicióse con la guerra y con la guerra se hundió en el vacío de los tiempos; las fiebres y la general escasez enseñóranse de nuestra capital. Para digno remate de tan lúgubre cuadro, el extranjero maldito atrevióse en hora menguada a atentar contra la soberanía de nuestra patria ... Guerra, escasez y fiebre, han sido por lo tanto los factores que explican de manera clara el aumento de la mortalidad habida durante el año 1902" (GDF, *Memoria*, 1903: 73).

But Caracas was to have some other *anni terribiles*. In 1909 Razetti summarized the pitiful sanitary state of the city in *El Universal* - one of the latest popular newspapers. Not only infrastructure constraints but also prostitution, alcoholism, poverty and other social plagues "poisoned" the life of the neglected capital:

"...Caracas está profundamente infectada; sus habitantes nos envenenamos lentamente con el aire que respiramos, con el agua que bebemos y con los alimentos que ingerimos; las enfermedades infecciosas, como la tuberculosis, se propagan libremente; el matadero, el mercado y los establecimientos de víveres no están reglamentados higiénicamente; no tenemos ni agua potable, ni cloacas, ni pavimento; la infancia no está protegida, y por eso perdemos cerca de 400 niños menores de cuatro años; nada se hace para combatir la prostitución y el alcoholismo, fuentes de innumerables enfermedades; la parte pobre de la población parece por falta

de trabajo para el obrero, y se muere de mengua, porque no hay hospitales ni asilos confortables; en una palabra, en Caracas se vive a merced de las causas de destrucción que rodean al hombre, sin que hasta hoy la clase directora se halla ocupado en mejorar siquiera las condiciones sanitarias de la ciudad" (Razetti, 1952, II: 170).

By the late 1900s the bubonic plague had also seized the capital, where it would remain endemic for more than a decade; the same happened with cholera and the so-called "gripe española". By those years, "bajo un cielo de peste, Caracas se debatía en contorsiones como una lombriz desesperada", according to Pocaterra's poignant tableau. In a series of articles in *El Universal*, Razetti then explained again the preconditions of proper disinfection in terms of an ultimatum: "guerra" against the rats and mosquitoes should become the *delenda Carthago* for Caraquenians and the Venezuelan authorities (1952, II: 586-88; Archila, 1956, I: 175-76). The war cry was thus uttered. The medical plea for sanitary reforms had achieved its widest resonance in the newspapers, fuelled by the national row about all sorts of plagues. As well as being a city with a remarkable concentration of well-known doctors, the 1900s Caracas had finally become a health-conscious capital clamouring for sanitary reforms (García de la Concha, 1962: 137-38).

19. Despite Razetti's complaints about their passivity, the Caraquenian authorities had taken some hygienic measures since the late nineteenth century. The urban and domestic cleaning of Caracas was completely assumed by the GDF in 1889, which represented a confirmation of the Guzmanian concern for cleanliness. The same year, Venezuela attended the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography held in Paris. In 1890 there was founded the Laboratorio Municipal de Caracas and the first

Inspector General de Higiene Pública was appointed. In his report to the DF government, the keen Inspector proclaimed the importance of Hygiene on the basis of its practice in the main cities of the Old Continent (GDF, *Memoria*, 1890: xvii, 161-63; 1891: 251-53, 275). As it has been mentioned, the GDF also attempted to tackle the problems of water supply and sewage in Caracas, through failed contracts with private entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the Sociedad de Médicos y Cirujanos de Caracas, the Instituto Pasteur and private charities still carried many of the sanitary responsibilities of the city (Archila, 1956, I: 116-17).

The main administrative breakthroughs occurred at the very end of the century, with Castro's rise to power and Juan Vicente Gómez's brief appointment as Governor of Caracas. Following the variola epidemics, in 1899 there were created the Juntas Parroquiales de Higiene, which shared the supervision of different Caraqueñan wards. Aiming at a more permanent structure, in December of the same year there were also established the Junta Administradora de los Hospitales and the first Dirección de Higiene y Estadística Demográfica (DHED). Emulating Disraeli's example, Castro's decree considered that it was "deber primordial de los gobernantes velar por la salubridad pública" and the hygienic conditions of the capital. The DHED included the Director, the Inspector, six Médicos de Ciudad and a Laboratorio Químico Municipal; among their main attributions were:

"Cuidar de que se conserven en buenas condiciones higiénicas las calles, plazas, habitaciones privadas y establecimientos públicos de cualquier género que sean y que se cumplan las prescripciones higiénicas en materia de alumbrado, desagües, cementerios, etc."

"Intervenir desde el punto de vista de las conveniencias de la higiene en los trabajos de edificios, cloacas, entubados y toda obra en que haya demolición de tierra, así como en la situación y traslación de

establecimientos insalubres o peligrosos.”.

“Velar por la higiene de las escuelas, talleres, cárceles, hospitales, templos, mercados y todo centro de aglomeración humana...” (arts. 2-5, GDF, 1899).

As well as being enabled to supervise hygienic conditions in public and private spaces, the DHED would also keep the statistical records of the Caraquenian population - whereby public clamour in this respect was paid attention to for the first time. Rísquez was appointed Director and Razetti Inspector; from those posts they familiarized themselves with the sanitary reality of Caracas which they were to discuss during the following years. Nevertheless, the administrative duo was ephemeral: in 1900, Rísquez went to Spain - where he stayed for ten years - while Razetti continued his crusade from the UCV. The DHED was rescued in 1902 with Herrera Tovar as new Director; this appointment was celebrated by Razetti, given the former's well-earned reputation with his demographic “Crónicas” in the GMC (Razetti, 1952, II: 161). Although Herrera's performance as Director was apparently not so effective, the DHED's supervision played a significant role until its final absorption by the central administration in 1911. As Rísquez was to recognize many years later, the DHED had been a first administrative breakthrough in the sanitary crusade, which was made possible by Gómez's short yet effective performance in the GDF (1931: 57; Archila, 1956, I: 124-25).

On April 20, 1907, the new Governor Gustavo J. Sanabria officially addressed the Academia Nacional de Medicina asking for technical advice about how to organize the service of public hygiene in the GDF. Published the following month in the GMC and later on in the newspapers by Razetti, the response of Ayala and J. Díaz on behalf of the Academia insisted on the gravity of the mortality syndrome in the capital. With 34x1000, the mortality-

rate of Caracas was not only higher than France's but also than that of Buenos Aires (18-20x1000), of Havana (20-22x1000), and of Rio (22x1000), where successful sanitary reforms had been applied. The English General Board of Health was again referred to as the paramount authority: it reckoned that any mortality-rate higher than 21x1000 was questionable and worth studying. With quotations from Disraeli about statesmen's obligations in relation to public health, the Academia finally proposed the creation of a similar board, "como se estila en los países civilizados, que se denominará 'Junta Superior de Sanidad'" (Razetti, 1952, II: 569-72). Following the English example, the innovative shift introduced by the academicians' report was that the proposed institution should have a national instead of a municipal scope, as it had had up to then.

New administrative changes waited to be catalysed by the arrival of the bubonic plague. In 1908 there were rescued the Comisiones Parroquiales de Higiene, already created during the 1899 variola epidemics; this time they gave birth to permanent Circunscripciones de Higiene in the Departamento Libertador (DL) - the administrative section of western Caracas (GDF, *Memoria*, 1911: 282). In addition, the Comisión de Higiene Pública acted throughout the successive outbursts of plague in 1900s Caracas (GMDF, 22-VI-1907, 10-VI-1909<sup>1</sup>). Though with a different name, the Academia's suggestion was finally implemented in March 1909, with the constitution of the Comisión de Higiene Pública. Besides the emergency measures against the plague, the Comisión developed a programme of preventive hygiene, including the design of new aqueduct and sewage systems. The Comisión also represented the first step towards the absorption of sanitary functions by the central government - a tendency

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<sup>1</sup> As in the case of the GO, the CMDF's *Gaceta Municipal del Distrito Federal* (GMDF) is to be quoted according to its date of issue

which was reinforced in later institutions (Archila, 1956, I: 144-48).

20. The 1900s also witnessed the first legal instruments for hygienic controls in Caracas. On August 10, 1903, the CMDF passed a *Reglamento de Higiene y Estadística Demográfica del Distrito Federal*, which tackled the problem of refuse disposal and the lack of municipal statistics - which in fact were regularly published in the GMDF from that year onwards. In 1906 the DL government issued a *Reglamento de Higiene y Salubridad Públicas*, which enabled the local Oficina General de Higiene to supervise the fulfilment of very general standards of salubrity in western Caracas. The urban chapters were concerned with water supply and drainage, as well as hygiene in the factories, rooms and public buildings (CMDF, 1906: 4-8, 25-27). An early response to the agenda reported by the Venezuelan physicians, the structure of the *Reglamento* seemed to be inspired by the DHED's competences, whilst its architectural regulations were still too vague.

A more comprehensive approach came with the 1910 *Ordenanza de Policía Urbana y Rural del Distrito Federal*, which incorporated for the first time the new sanitary requisites to the legal apparatus for controlling the growth of Caracas. Though highly committed to the "public order" required by Juan Vicente Gómez's dictatorial needs, the new urban policing also dealt with traditional aspects of municipal life which were now being updated. In relation to "civil architecture", street width was enhanced: 12 m for the roadway and 1.3-2.7 m for the pavements became the norm. The traditional grid was maintained as the urban pattern for the new areas; El Paraíso was the only exception, with different architectural types and street sections (arts.

99, 102, 118, CMDF, 1910). The main regulations on domestic architecture, some of which had appeared already in the 1906 *Reglamento*, were obviously due to the hygienical debate. Each house had to have a WC and bathroom with adduction to public sewers. The capacity, illumination and ventilation of bedrooms were given minimal parameters (arts. 109-10, 113-14). The built area of plots was also regulated, in order to liberate space for the ventilation and hygiene of the building. The sewage and drainage of houses had to be rigorously calculated and designed, so that they would not flow into public roads. New regulations on street paving were a partial response to Razetti's recent complaints in the newspapers (arts. 119 ff., 135-37, 149-53, 207, 293-96). The process for the building and remodelling of private houses was formalized under the inspection and approval of the Ingenierfa Municipal, which also was supposed to supervise the development of the new tram lines (arts. 159 ff., 192). The Ingenierfa thus became an administrative body responsible not only for controlling the civil architecture of Caracas but also its urban expansion.

"Salubridad pública" was also recognized as another major component of urban policing from the very beginning. In this respect, the 1910 *Ordenanza* not only enhanced the loose controls of its 1871 predecessor, but also incorporated some of the administrative innovations adopted during the recent years. For every town with more than 1,000 people there was appointed a Médico de Ciudad, who should not only treat the diseases of the local population but also report them to the heads of the Juntas de Higiene. In accordance with the structure of the *Reglamento*, the GDF was supposed to control the hygiene of factories, private rooms and public buildings (arts. 193, 208, 214, 300 ff., CMDF, 1910). Following the traditional repertoire of municipal services, the new *Ordenanza* finally tightened the



regulations on cemeteries, public markets, slaughter houses, hospitals, prisons, rubbish-heaps and aqueducts, which thereafter had to fulfil the conditions prescribed by "modern Hygiene" (arts. 216 ff., 265 ff., 274 ff., 284 ff., 291 ff., 324 ff., 397 ff.).

Although it is a piece apparently unknown or forgotten in the literature about the emergence of modern planning in Venezuela, the 1910 *Ordenanza* seems to be a turning point of the urban discourses and administrative changes in the capital. On the one hand, the hygienical debate which had permeated Caraquenian society during the two previous decades was being responded to: sanitary requirements were given for the first time an architectural and urban framework, which in someway alleviated the social clamour in that respect. As often happens, the urban debate about health had preceded the national one: once the municipal basis for the sanitary system was set up, the official sector was to be more concerned about the health service on a national level. Even though the sanitary question in Caracas was certainly to persist in the forthcoming decades, it would have different targets - as we shall see. On the other hand, the *Ordenanza* was keeping together the major strands of Guzmanian urban art, namely public decorum, ornamentation and cleanliness - though obviously stressing and updating the latter in terms of the new apparatus of public salubrity and hygiene. On the opening of the Gómez era, the 1910 *Ordenanza* thus testified that the ornamental thread had not been lost in the hygienical debate; it would be a challenge for the progressive furore of the forthcoming decades to conserve and to transmit that heritage.

The Caracas of Crespo and Castro has often been described by the Venezuelan historians as a "ciudad dormida" (Mijares, 1960: 155; Arellano,

1972: 144; Polanco, 1983: 122-23). On the contrary, the city had undergone a major urban revolution: *public hygiene* had been incorporated into its urban policing agenda. Without yet satisfying the desires of Alberto Soria and Luis Razetti for a complete city, Caracas had certainly taken a big step in its restless pilgrimage along the path set by European progress and civilization. With the incorporation of sanitary reforms, *belle-époque* Caracas had entered the domains of a new urban order.

"Sanitas sanctorum, omnia sanitas"

Benjamin Disraeli's motto

## ON THE EVE OF URBANISM

21. Before going on with the description of the expanding agenda of Gómez's Caracas, let us take a glance at the European urban reforms which had been so much advertised by the Venezuelan physicians, so that we can confirm the adequacy of their interpretation and the delay of their arrival in Venezuela and the rest of the continent. Without intending to describe all the components which brought about modern urbanism in Europe - a task beyond the scope of this research - let us also feature some other questions whose importation informed the urban agenda of major Latin American capitals, from the late nineteenth century until the eve of the first urban plans. Lastly, from an epistemological point of view, let us try to conceptualize the urban changes and breakthroughs of *belle-époque* Caracas, setting them in perspective with Guzmanian urban art and the rest of the Gómez era.

In comparison with Britain's urban chronology, the sanitary debate had come to Venezuela with considerable delay. Victorian society had paid increasing attention to the problems of industrial cities since the 1830s, when acrimonious denouncements about the shocking urbanization paved the way for more comprehensive approaches in the second half of the century. The bulk of the critique was addressed to the problem of unhealthy living standards in the crowded houses of industrial towns, which fuelled the constitution of a "public health movement", articulated by the 1840s around Sir Edwin Chadwick's sanitary reports (Briggs, 1963: 12; Lees, 1985: 56-58; Cherry, 1992: 23-24). Chadwick was commissioner of the Board of Health (1848-54) - which was to be praised so highly by the Venezuelan physicians fifty years later. The movement's first legal breakthrough was the passage of the 1848 *Public Health Act*, including controls on services like drainage, cleaning, water supply and lighting; local councils were also given responsibilities in health management. A major achievement came during Disraeli's administration: in the 1875 *Public Health Act*, sanitary controls were extended to housing and street patterns, according to the claims of the "housing reform movement" which had also been articulated by the mid-nineteenth century. Although the housing debate was to continue for some decades, by the 1880s Britain had already tackled the two main urban problems of the industrial city, namely health and housing. For the rest of the century, a boosted municipal administration overseeing the sanitary and environmental controls on residential developments was Britain's major credential on the European scene (Abercrombie, 1959: 77-79; Cherry, 1992: 16, 27, 34-36, 57).

When Friedrich Engels warned fellow countrymen about *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* (1845), Germany's industrialization and

urbanization had not yet reached their peak. With fewer traumas than in Britain, it was only by the 1870s when industrialization crammed the Berlin *Mietskasernen* - the tenement houses probably borne in mind by Herrera Vegas when describing the nests of tuberculosis in big cities. In addition to health and housing, another component of Germany's urban agenda was the consolidation of the *Städtebau*, which brought together the aforementioned strands of Baumeister's urban engineering and Sitte's artistic design. Although the first edition of Joseph Stübgen's *Der Städtebau* (1890) was a response to Sitte's approach, later editions brought together the two strands of the new discipline - a fusion later facilitated by the publication of the journal *Der Städtebau* (1904), edited by Sitte and Theodor Goecke. While providing more technical support for the extension plans for German towns, the *Städtebau* "manuals" formalized - from the epistemological point of view - the scientific vocabulary already begun in the treatises of the so-called "urbanism of regularization" (Choay, 1969: 25-26; Wieckzorek, 1981: 90-91, 171). By assembling all those strands of the urban debate, German reformers could set the housing question into a larger social and spatial framework, which also included policies on public land and transport. With all those ingredients, a more "comprehensive planning" was able to crystallize without difficulty by the late nineteenth century (Sutcliffe, 1981: 9 ff; Bullock and Read, 1985: 52-70, 527; Ladd, 1992: 43-48, 97, 186-227).

Despite T. C. Horsfall's report on German advances, presented to the English audience in *The Improvements of the Dwellings and Surroundings of the People. The Example of Germany* (1904), the idea of planning in 1900s Britain was still limited to "town extension" or "town improvement" (Nettleford, 1914: 225-37; Ashworth, 1954: 77; Cherry, 1992: 70). Packed in

with the rest of German municipal planning, there arrived a belated and "medievalized" version of Sitte's organicism, the last catalyst for Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902), which turned out to be a manifesto in which the English position in relation to metropolitan growth was prefigured (Brunetti, 1978: 51; Collins, 1986: 100-104). Following the early examples provided by "company towns" like the Levers' Port Sunlight (1888) and the Cadburys' Bournville (1895), the "garden idea" thereafter inspired the two main patterns of town extension in England: the new model village and the suburban development (Nettleford, N.d.; Ashworth, 1954: 81-164; Cherry, 1992: 62-64). Whilst the former was championed by Howard himself, the latter was Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker's more realistic response to the sprawl of London and other big cities, through the incorporation of peripheral housing schemes with lower densities and open spaces. Prevailing over Howard's original idea, the "garden suburb" or "garden village" was to become Britain's major urban export after sanitary reform, not only to Europe but also to the rest of the world (Mumford, 1961: 567, 592; Buder, 1990: 97-98; Hall, 1992: 37-41).

Meanwhile, despite its medical discoveries in the field of hygiene, France seemed to play a secondary role in the urbanism which was about to emerge in Europe. By the 1880s, the densification due to Haussmann's surgery had aggravated the housing problem. Later on, the *Städtebau* tradition was introduced to the French-speaking world by the Belgian Charles Buls in his *Esthétiques des villes* (1893). However, apart from all the glamour of the *belle époque*, 1900s France mainly relied on her Second-Empire grandeur, which apparently restrained new urban research for the new century. The European agenda on public health, housing and urban expansion seemed to be a dialogue between Britain and Germany (Horsfall,

1904: 4-5; Sutcliffe, 1981: 190-94; Choay, 1983: 174).

22. Due to a less traumatic industrialization, sanitary concern in nineteenth-century Latin America started with greater independence from housing than in Europe. Building and environmental ordinances in major capitals were allegedly an attempt to respond to European ideas on public health. The British example was prominent: the 1848 and 1875 Acts were studied in different countries, especially in Argentina, where they apparently inspired the works and reforms of Guillermo Rawson and Samuel Gache. By the 1880s, Buenos Aires pioneered, with Montevideo, the creation of institutions specializing in hygienical research, which were followed by similar ones in Mexico City, Santiago and Lima (Wilson, 1972: 33-35; Hardoy, 1990: 25, 31). The exchange of experiences across the Americas also played an important role in diffusing the new ideas. The 1897 and 1902 Conferencias Interamericanas held in Mexico City discussed the hygienical agenda and encouraged the attendants to pursue international agreements, some of them reached in the 1905 Convención Sanitaria. In addition, the 1898 Congress of Hygiene and Demography had taken place in Madrid, after being widely advertised in local journals like the GMC; having included sections on "Higiene urbana" and "Ingeniería y Arquitectura urbana", the Congress represented a unique opportunity for Spanish-speaking countries to update their sanitary agendas (*Conferencias*, 1938, I: 98). On the basis of such events, the programmes implemented in capitals like Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Rio and Havana were well known by the turn of the new century - as has been confirmed in the Venezuelan physicians' report (Herrera Vegas, 1901: 110; Razetti, 1952, II: 167, 570-74).

In addition to the hygienical reforms, the residential expansion informed another chapter of the urban agenda in major capitals of Latin America. With Buenos Aires and Rio reaching one million people, the colonial profile and urban structure of the most populous cities had changed by the 1900s. Crammed since the late nineteenth century with administrative and commercial activities, the traditional centres also sheltered rural immigrants attracted by the industrialization; the upper and middle classes then started to look for new residential locations, thus setting the direction of development for their capitals. The expansion just set out in Caracas with El Paraíso was undertaken as proper *ensanches* in major capitals (Amato, 1970; Gutiérrez, 1984: 517-18; Hardoy, 1989: 267-68). That is the moment when the “ciudades jardín” supposedly arrived. A loose use of the term has sometimes labelled as such some late-nineteenth-century examples, from the first “colonias” of Porfirio Díaz’s Mexico City to Castro’s El Paraíso (Gutiérrez, 1984: 523; Nazoa, 1977: 177). But others claim that Howard’s garden city concept “was never transported to Latin America”, which was “attracted” instead to the ideas of the “garden suburb” and the “bedroom garden suburb” for the middle and working classes respectively. Examples of this type include Mexico City’s Colonia Balbuena (1933), Rio’s Realengo (1942) and Buenos Aires’s El Palomar in the 1940s. However, the only examples directly related to the English methodology were some of Sao Paulo’s new areas, developed with Barry Parker’s collaboration during the 1920s and 1930s (Hardoy, 1990: 26-27; Sica, 1977, II: 789-90). Caracas would allegedly offer some examples of garden suburbs as well, which are to be mentioned later on.

Despite its urban backwardness in Europe, France kept its protagonism gained in the nineteenth century by prolonging the Beaux-Arts repertoire in

Latin American capitals, from Mexico City to Buenos Aires (Gutiérrez, 1984: 514-32; Hardoy, 1990: 33). This steady presence was to be very important for the later choice of France as godparent of some of the first urban plans for major capitals - as we shall see in the next chapter.

23. In addition to the hygienical reforms which had inspired Caraquenian innovations in this field, ECI's readers were also told of other shifts within the urban debate in Europe. Without naming their English inventors, new experiences with garden cities were reported surprisingly early, but only as a final materialization of the "ciudad ideal" conceived by the French geographer Elisée Reclus:

*"Garden City* será la ciudad modelo, la ciudad tipo, ideal, construída con perfecta sujeción á los principios higiénicos, con todos los perfeccionamientos de la ciencia. Cada edificio privado reunirá las ventajas de la casa de la ciudad y de la casa de campo.

"Las calles serán espaciosas. En cada uno de los distritos se construirá un inmenso parque, abierto para el público. En el centro de la ciudad habrá un gran jardín, alrededor del cual se edificarán una biblioteca, un teatro, un museo, un hospital, el ayuntamiento y un 'music-hall'" (ECI, VIII, 186, 15-IX-1899: 621).

Combining both the comfort of urbanization with the healthiness of country life, the advantages of garden cities were later opposed to the inconveniences of overcrowded metropolises; among the latter there were densities which spanned from New York's 3,810 to Paris's 400 inhabitants per ha, whereas the garden cities only had 18 inhabitants per ha, and boasted a mortality-rate of 5x100 (ECI, XII, 514, 1-I-1913: 263).



But contemporary metropolises also had their own advocates, such as the modernist writer Max Nordau - who probably disliked the medieval-oriented background of the garden city utopia. A few years after John Ruskin's death had been lamented in ECI, the German critic's appraisal of modern streets was translated as another reminder of the decay of the Gothic revival in Europe (ECI, IX, 200, 15-IV-1900: 258-59). Nordau started by lashing the romantic distortion elaborated by the lovers of Hugo's *Notre Dame*, which had led people to think in terms of two types of cities:

"la ciudad histórica, que relata en cada una de sus piedras un largo y venerable pasado, y la ciudad moderna, improvisada por decirlo así, brillante, cómoda, práctica, pero con demasiado olor á cosa nueva. La ciudad advenediza pasa por ser un producto particularmente norteamericano" (Nordau, 1904: 48).

Despite his originally belonging to the Old World, the German belittled the Gothic street, "porque está muerta y enterrada"; instead, the modern avenue - crowded and packed with electric-lights, skyscrapers and posters - was undoubtedly superior: "Nunca y en ninguna parte ha sido más bella que en la gran ciudad contemporánea" (Nordau, 1904: 49).

Meanwhile - after a detailed account of the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris - the *belle-époque* fans were somehow disappointed with ECI's final proclamation of the event as a failure: "no se encuentra en ella nada que supere, como en la anterior, á las grandes construcciones de cerámica y de hierro, que señalaban una nueva orientación de la arquitectura moderna, á la maravillosa sala de máquinas y á la soberbia y sorprendente torre de Eifel (*sic*)" (ECI, IX, 209, 1-IX-1900: 558). As well as being devotees of the Parisian landmark of the *belle époque*, 1900s Caraquenians were still

enthusiasts for the innovational wonders of the Crystal Palace, also pictured and commented on in ECI (XIV, 328, 15-VIII-1905: 505-507). But they apparently surrendered to the Beaux-Arts eclecticism of the 1900 Exhibition, at least according to the aforementioned works of Castro's architects. Even just before the First Centenary of Venezuelan Independence, Seijas Cook's project for the palace of the forthcoming Exhibition - which had won the prize of the Academia de Bellas Artes in 1909 - was praised for being inspired on the French Renaissance style, whilst its entrances imitated those of the Paris Opera (ECI, XVIII, 426, 15-IX-1909: 511-12; XIX, 448, 15-VIII-1910: 473-74; Seijas Cook, 1936: 325).

24. Puzzled by fragmentary reports about the advantages of garden cities and the lure of street life in modern metropolises, with the critique of Beaux-Arts eclecticism and its persistence in their capital, *belle-époque* Caraquenians probably asked themselves about their own urbanistic whereabouts - a question difficult to answer, really. The urban agenda for the industrial city represented an epistemological precondition for the emergence of European urbanism by the turn of the new century. The aforementioned questions of public health, housing and infrastructure had informed a "critical order" which prompted a new "critical planning" by the late nineteenth century (Choay, 1965: 10-15; 1969: 7-10). In administrative terms, that "planning" was prefigured in the controls on housing and infrastructure of the industrial city - a type of "public intervention" which set up the basis for the more comprehensive regulations of the following century. The housing and public health questions also gave birth to the major issue of "social hygiene" - an approach consolidated across Europe by the early 1900s, through the establishment of permanent committees of

major international events in this field. From the perspective of urban design, the search for that critical planning was also present in the aforementioned debates about the *Städtebau* and town extension planning; added to French monumental grandeur, those strands had provided the spatial vocabulary for the emergence of European urbanism by the turn of the twentieth century (Sutcliffe, 1981: 5-6; 163-73, 203-204).

But that crystallization of urbanism did not take place simultaneously in Caracas, since the necessary components were obviously fragmented and delayed; instead, the Venezuelan capital continued throughout the *belle époque* with the partial reforms which had started since the late nineteenth century. With the same eclecticism favoured by contemporary architects, the heterodox agenda of Crespo's and Castro's Caracas combined progressive questions concerning Europe's emerging urbanism with belated reports on urban design and architecture. Nevertheless, the questions and reforms of the *belle époque* can no longer be considered as an urban art, since the former relied upon technical journals, professional events and legal instruments - an analytical apparatus which was to be consolidated throughout the Gómez era. In this respect, from 1911 the *Revista Técnica del Ministerio de Obras Públicas* (RTMOP) was to increase the means for specialized discussions about traffic, urban sprawl and housing, which would bring about new institutions and instruments. At the same time, the urban novels would remain as another domain for shaping individual consciousness about the city, by portraying the attitudes of the characters of the late *belle époque* in relation to Gómez's Caracas.

However - let us anticipate and thereby justify its inclusion in this chapter - the urban agenda of the Gómez era cannot yet be considered a proper

urbanism, since the absence of an overall plan for Caracas impeded the crystallization of the discipline until the late 1930s. By those years, the major Latin capitals would have long since undertaken their first urban plans and crossed the threshold of modern urbanism - as we shall see in the next chapter. But despite its early start and its relative vitality in the hygienical debate and other questions, Caracas was to linger for nearly three more decades in the domains of partial urban reforms, without reaching a comprehensive urbanism. Let us pick up the historical thread which will explain why the eve of Caraqueñan urbanism lasted for so long.

*"Orden y Progreso no son conceptos que se excluyan ni contradigan. Es el uno condición indispensable del otro, sobre todo en un Estado nuevo, con historia corta y tradiciones recientes".*

José Gil Fortoul, *El Hombre y la Historia* (1896)

## ORDER AND PROGRESS

25. When Doctor Israël refused to abandon his Berlin clinic *Hygieia* in order to perform a kidney operation on General Castro in Caracas, the Venezuelan President perhaps thought that he could imitate the example of Guzmán by ruling the country from Europe. Don Cipriano also probably remembered the early days of the Revolución Restauradora, when he used to leave his *compadre* Don Juan Vicente in charge of his own hacienda in the Andes (Núñez, 1986: 168; Picón Salas, 1991: 373-74). In spite of all the intrigues that El Cabito's urban courtiers had tried to hatch between the two provincial cronies, General Gómez had proved to be an efficient and reliable right-hand man throughout Castro's administration. As soon as the

revolutionaries gained Caracas in 1899, General Gómez performed well in the GDF - as we have already seen - and also in the government of their home region, Táchira. Later on, his military campaigns had put an end to civil rebellions against Castro by the mid-1900s. From then onwards, General Gómez proved to be a loyal Vice-President and friend, who never took part in Don Cipriano's misdemeanours - as Doña Zoila could confirm when they were neighbours in El Paraíso. With so many deeds contrasting with Castro's growing dissipation, one can agree that "nadie ha preparado un viaje para Europa con la minuciosidad con que Gómez arregló el del General Castro" - as the Colombian biographer Fernando González jibed in *Mi Compadre* (1934: 106).

With a balanced combination 45% of White and 45% Indian components - added to the necessary 10% of Black stubbornness - the "Brujo" (warlock) of the Andes incarnated for González the physical and spiritual prototype that the Latin race should pursue. Though unfamiliar with this type of man, Lady Dorothy Mills was also to feel something of the dictator's spell when she visited *The Country of the Orinoco* in the 1920s:

"At first sight the face reminded one of a shrewd kindly peasant, but behind the keen eyes one sensed power, acumen, reserve, maybe a hint of cruelty. Cordiality without expansion, personality without presence, the military clothes and bearing were in odd juxtaposition with a pair of black cotton gloves" (Mills, 1930: 22).

Though with several mistresses and children, Don Juan Vicente had never married; he was "feudal in his ideas and habits". Lady Mills also noticed that General Gómez remained "concerned with horses and little else, and had but little education"; though not literate, he had "a fine business head" and

was "open-minded to foreign enterprise" (1930: 17).

This was the man appointed by Castro to replace him provisionally in the government, when he boarded the vessel *Guadeloupe* in 1908, a replacement which was transformed into a 27-year dictatorship: the "Gomezalato" (1908-1935). Apart from the ill-omened coincidence that Pío Gil - who took further notes for the books which definitively destroyed El Cabito's reputation - was also on board, Gómez was soon to wipe out his *compadre* from power and from history. If one drops Castro from the major chapters of Venezuelan history, the silent condor of the Andes - who never flew out of Venezuela - would thus stand as an antithesis to the verbose and sophisticated leader of the Guzmanato. Decrying the Illustrious American and other Frenchified rulers of Latin America, the Colombian biographer pronounced his own historical verdict in this respect: "Gran Americano es el montañero Gómez. Aquél era rastacuero" (González, 1934: 14, 59). But let us make the comparison for ourselves.

26. Though one of the first conflicts he had to face was the invasion of Venezuelan waters by a Dutch fleet, Gómez was not to repeat Castro's history of blockades by Europe and quarrels with the Colossus. The former landlord applied his austere and thrifty discipline to the management of his new national hacienda. In this respect, one of the main goals of his administration was to clear the Venezuelan economy from the international debts which had been rising since the Independence years. To the amazement of his creditors, Gómez was already able to pay a great deal of his predecessors' commitments by 1912; the Yankees' official approval of such a sensible policy was then confirmed by their sending the American

Secretary to visit Caracas in the same year (Pino Iturrieta, 1988: 45). The invigorated relationship with Woodrow Wilson's administration was not jeopardized when the General decided not to break Venezuela's neutrality in World War I, despite American pressures. According to the Caraquenian intelligentsia's sympathy for the entente, Gómez's decision was due to his confessed admiration for the Kaiser as a leader and for Germany as a great neighbour (Caballero, 1994: 164-69). But beyond that, there was his deep respect for the discipline of the German merchants whom the young Don Juan had met in the Andes - a vivid memory which had probably inspired some of his successful methods as a manager (González, 1934: 169; Velásquez, 1979: 47).

Gómez's neutrality proved to be right for boosting the Venezuelan economy during the conflict - a major achievement made easier by the increase of prices of raw materials and the discovery and exploitation of petroleum in the hitherto agricultural country. The black oil thereafter fuelled the last episode of the superpowers' long-lasting battle for the Venezuelan economy, which had certainly become an arena of vital importance for the North Atlantic bloc by the 1920s (McBeth, 1983: 3, 110). Even in 1922, the British companies' early advantage was recognized by the American Trade Commissioner to Venezuela, Purl Lord Bell: "At the present time British interests strongly predominate. Of the 12 oil companies holding property in Venezuela, at least 7 are under British control, in most cases through the Royal Dutch Shell" (1922: 94-95). But Gómez's performance of the so-called "danza de las concesiones" was finally devoted to the American companies, which had taken the lead by the late 1920s. After all, the energetic Americans who came to live in the oil camps were very much like those tireless Germans whom Gómez had so much admired in the Andean shops (Betancourt, 1956:

25-44; Velásquez, 1979: 231-34).

Besides the allotment of oil concessions and the final payment of the debt by the 1920s, Gómez's administration exhibited other credentials for Venezuela's definitive incorporation in the North-Atlantic bloc and its internal structuring as a capitalistic economy. The invitation to foreign investors to come back to the country, the reestablishment of commercial relationships with Castro's creditors, the granting of fiscal facilities to foreign capitals and the enlargement of an internal market enriched by the black gold characterized the economic scene of Gómez's booming Venezuela (Lombardi, 1982: 213-14). With great enthusiasm, Commissioner Bell had reported these breakthroughs to the Department of Commerce in the early post-War years, which had

"given the country new commercial life and stimulus. Business in general was at its height early in 1920 and improvements of all kinds were under way. Education is being modernized along practical lines. Banking has been brought up to a high standard with the establishment of foreign banks in the country since 1917 and with trade facilitated and actually created thereby. Venezuela may be termed one of the most advanced of Latin American countries" (Bell, 1922: 30).

American businessmen apparently responded to the Commissioner's invitation, since their investments in Venezuela amounted to \$162 million by 1928 - in flagrant contrast with 3 million in 1912 (Rodríguez Gallad, 1993: 87-90). Such an affluence of capital has been regarded as Venezuela's final entrance into the era of North American neo-colonialism, which definitively sealed the United States' victory in a battle that Britain and its European partners had been losing since the opening of the century (Brito Figueroa, 1966, II: 359-426; Carrera Damas, 1988: 109; Toro, 1993: 253-54).



27. Venezuela not only underwent the transformation from a big hacienda into an oil-exporter economy, but also from a country of countless revolutions and civil wars into the subdued *pays de Gómez* visited by Jean-Louis Lapeyre in the 1930s. Having spent three years in the court of the "Benemérito" (Well-deserving), the French biographer could confirm how the "César populaire et démocrate" had enabled Venezuela to escape from the "querelles intestines qui le débilitaient sans cesse davantage et qui ne lui auraient jamais permis de prendre rang parmi les nations de civilisation avancée" (1937: 72). A similar impression had been made on fellow traveller Georges Lafond, who thought General Gómez was "la personnalité la plus remarquable du continent américain", despite "les mesures souvent draconiennes qu'il dut employer pour atteindre le résultat aujourd'hui pleinement acquis" (1927: 27-28). Among other means of repression, these Draconian measures included hundreds of shackled prisoners who suffered medieval-like tortures in the dungeons of the iron regime, which was labelled by its opponents as "la vergüenza de América" (Pocaterra, 1966, III).

Apart from jails and repression, the dictatorial machinery of the "pacificateur du Vénézuéla" also relied upon the pseudo-positivistic interpretation of Venezuela's turbulent history, carried out by the erudite intellectuals who served the illiterate Caesar. One of the cornerstones of this ideology was provided by Laureano Vallenilla Lanz's *Cesarismo Democrático* (1919) - which turned out to be a sort of best seller for Latin American dictators of the period. Based on the idea of the military chief explored by Herbert Spencer and Fustel de Coulanges, the former student of the Sorbonne and the College de France proposed the concept of a "Gendarme Necesario", as the

only way to overcome the political traumas of the unsettled republic released by the Liberator. The Democratic Caesar was also necessary for achieving the integration of the regional peoples into an organic society, according to Vallenilla's own version of the stages of solidarity distinguished by René Wormes and Emile Durkheim (1961: 123, 179-80, 207-208). Unveiling his advocacy for General Gómez and his achievements, the sociologist finally proclaimed the legitimate necessity "de un gobierno fuerte, dirigido por un hombre de estado, por un patriota consciente de sus deberes, quien como otros grandes caudillos de América, representa la encarnación misma del poder y mantiene la paz, el orden, la regularidad administrativa, el crédito interior y exterior..." (Vallenilla, 1961: 220).

This necessity of rigid Order - as the only way of overcoming the romantic idealism and fruitless revolutions of the nineteenth-century republic - had certainly been anticipated by Gil Fortoul, another intellectual godfather of the Gómez regime. Following Spencer's entreaty to thinkers to express their thought, no matter how unpopular it might be, the historian had long since pleaded for civic Order in order to reach the desired goal of Progress (1896: 136). In view of Venezuela's advantageous alliance with the Colossus, Vallenilla finally confirmed the Gómez regime as the materialization of Gil's early formula; "Calibán, en el fondo, nos presta mayores servicios que Próspero", added the sociologist, following Renan's rejection of the old spirituality inherited from Spain (Vallenilla, 1961: 220).

As well as being necessary for subduing the internal turmoil of Venezuelan history, Gómez's totalitarianism was not very different from what happened afterwards in inter-War Europe, according to Arcaya's late justification of *The Gómez regime in Venezuela and its Background* (1935). From Washington,

the Venezuelan Ambassador opposed the international critique of the dictatorship which came to be epitomized in Thomas Rourke's *Tyrant of the Andes*, where the economic achievements of the "lucky" dictator were wiped out by comparison with his horrendous crimes. The erudite Venezuelan - whose private library amounted to 70,000 volumes - had to call upon one of the heroes of Roman Antiquity in order to match the merits of the "Founder of Peace": when Scipio Africanus was to be brought to trial before the Roman nation on minor charges, the general who had conquered and destroyed Carthage just took the Romans to the temple, in order to thank the gods again for his past prowess in Africa.

"Following his example, General Gómez might have said to the Venezuelans, before whom he was accused, 'Let us travel over the Republic by automobile, over the highways which I have opened, and return to the National Pantheon to give thanks to God before the tomb of Bolívar, because civil wars have ceased in our land, which he liberated, and because the debts of the nation have been paid'" (Arcaya, 1936: 225)

The Venezuelan Scipio died unchallenged in the same year as the publication of Arcaya's panegyric in the English-speaking world. For a long time, a historical revenge prevented the critique of the Gómez regime from recognizing any of his achievements; but later approaches have tended to adopt a more balanced assessment. Taking advantage of Venezuela's suicidal past of civil wars and upheavals, Gómez's "doctors" obviously misinterpreted and forced the thesis of their beloved European masters, in order to justify the harsh dictatorship (Luna, 1971: 91, 103; Pino, 1978: 57-64; 1993: 201; Urbaneja, 1993: 65). Nevertheless, the costly loan from the school of Comte made possible 27 years of "Unión, Paz y Trabajo" - a formula which proved to be important for the modern evolution of Venezuela and the rest of the continent (Griffin, 1961: 143; Lombardi, 1982: 207).

Although Gómez's intellectuals certainly fabricated a "golden legend" of his deeds, the "black legend" woven by his opponents has ignored a social and cultural transformation which did occur during the era of the "liberal tyrant" (Segnini, 1987: 13-23, 255-60; Caballero, 1994). Beyond a political trial which is far from being over, let us just add that the Benemérito's project of Order and Progress represented a historic mutation of the *Ilustre Americano's* Progress and Civilization - inasmuch as the rustic Andean incarnated the antithesis of the cosmopolitan Caraquenian.

"Cómo se escuchó, tanto en las grandes como en las pequeñas aldeas, en las extensas llanuras como en las abruptas serranías, el himno de las herramientas, la piqueta del obrero construyendo y reparando Edificios, Templos, Acueductos, Carreteras, Puentes y todo cuanto se hacía necesario para el mejoramiento de nuestros pueblos."

José Antonio Linares, *El General Juan Vicente Gómez y las obras públicas en Venezuela* (1916)

## SANITATION AND COMMUNICATION

28. From the beginning of his regime, Gómez's shift towards a more progressive model was made evident in terms of his policy of public works, which eclipsed the predominance of ornamentation inherited from Guzmanian times. The 1909 *Ley de Obras Públicas* already classified public works according to three new types: "de necesidad pública", such as roads and aqueducts; "de comunidad y utilidad públicas", such as bridges and buildings for public administration; and "de ornato público", which included monuments, statues and the rest of public edifices (art. 2, *Ley...*, 15-IV-1909). On August 14, 1909, the President was empowered by the

Venezuelan Congress to undertake all the necessary works in order to "organizar la Higiene Pública en todo el país, de acuerdo con los principios científicos modernos y la práctica establecida en los países civilizados" (art. 2, GO, 14-VIII-1909). A few days later, the *Ley de Expropiación por causa de utilidad pública* paved the way for the government to carry out "todas las obras concernientes al saneamiento de las poblaciones o su ensanche y reforma interior" (art. 11, *Ley...*, 3-IX-1909). The initial apparatus was completed with another decree issued by Gómez and endorsed by his progressive Minister Román Cárdenas - the same man who created the RTMOP - which established that 50% of the MOP budget should be addressed to public roads (art 9, GO, 25-VI-1910).

Gómez had his down-to-earth priorities endorsed by the Venezuelan doctors as well. On the eve of the first Centenary of Venezuela's Declaration of Independence, a presidential decree (19-IV-1910) summoned the representatives of all municipalities to report their local conditions at the first Congreso de Municipalidades, due to take place the following year. Appointed by another presidential decree (19-I-1911), Razetti headed the Preparatory Commission, which distinguished six working areas; those most concerned with urban aspects were "Obras y Comunicaciones" and "Sanidad y Régimen Hospitalario" - the latter chaired by Rísquez. Stressing the importance of congresses as scientific events, the Commission also emphasized the special significance of this Congreso for local bodies, given that municipal administration was no longer an art but a science:

"En lo municipal esto es aún más estricto, porque el gobierno de la Comuna no es asunto de arte, sino que es aquel ramo preciso de la ciencia administrativa al que incumbe la doble tarea esencial de ajustar a equidad el arbitrio e inversión de la renta y de educar el espíritu municipal, espíritu

de equidad y pulcritud, mediante cuyo insustituible estímulo la ciudad y la aldea crecen sana y armoniosa y conscientemente, atribuyendo a higienistas, a ingenieros, a economistas, el cuidado de la salud común, el de las obras de saneamiento, comunicación y ornato y el de distribuir con suficiencia y decoro la renta indispensable a las más urgentes necesidades del municipio. O, expresándolo de otro modo, el gobierno comunal es la ciencia de civilizar y urbanizar una comunidad con los propios recursos de la región, y de crear, equitativamente, la autonomía económica de la entidad administrativa..." (Actas, 1913: 11).

Besides conceiving municipal management as a science to be entrusted to technical specialists, the Commission seemed to boost the government's progressive yet thrifty programme of public works, whose new priorities were made explicit: sanitation, communication and ornamentation. This sequence was corroborated in the conclusions of the Congress, which met from April 19 to May 1, 1911. In relation to sanitation, the Comisión de Sanidad y Régimen Hospitalario proposed to draft a "Plan de Higienización Nacional", which should be entrusted to the "verdaderos apóstoles de la Higiene". Although such a national plan was not apparently realized, the recommended *Reglamento de Sanidad* was approved on July 11, 1912. In terms of communication, the Congreso recommended the adoption of a standard model of *Ordenanza de Vías de Comunicación y demás Obras Municipales*, where the case of Caracas was taken as a model for the rest of Venezuelan cities (Actas, 1913: 46-47, 107-11).

Other administrative changes consolidated sanitation and communication as national priorities in public works. A formal yet significant detail, from 1911 onwards the order of the MOP official reports was inverted: public roads preceded ornamental works, thus breaking a tradition stemming from the Guzmanian ministry. Ornamental works were not even reported between

1914 and 1918, which evinced the austere priorities of the government during World War I. Though it had been dealing with aqueducts and other services since the Guzmanato, the MOP enhanced its sanitary responsibilities by including "obras de saneamiento", which became a permanent section from 1918; from 1934 on, "obras sanitarias" increasingly absorbed other infrastructure services, until the Dirección de Obras Hidráulicas was finally created in 1940. In parallel with the MOP's internal changes, other institutions bolstered the sanitary programme: the Consejo Superior de Higiene y Salubridad Públicas (1910), the Oficina de Sanidad Nacional (1911), the Ministerio de Salubridad y Agricultura y Cría (1930) - including a special Dirección for the DF - and finally the Ministerio de Sanidad y Asistencia Social (MSAS), up to the present.

Though less conspicuous than Guzmanian monuments, sanitation and communication turned out to be the priorities of Gómez's public works, which certainly bolstered up his political aims as well. First, thanks to the statistical apparatus provided by the new institutions, it could be known that Venezuela reversed, from 1915, the demographic decadence which had prevailed since 1840 (Vandellós, 1938: 21-22). As Rísquez celebrated when opening the 1931 Conferencia Sanitaria Nacional, "sanear es poblar" proved to be one of Gómez's more successful formulas throughout the country - a formula which had already been applied in his brief performance as governor of Caracas (1931: 57). Secondly, all means of communication - from telegraphs to roads - had to be welcomed by a regime keen on controlling a vast territory which had hidden many a revolution in the past (Velásquez, 1979: 292-94). In this respect, Gómez's roads programme proved to be more effective than Guzmán's railways project - which came to be a symbol of bankrupt Venezuela. Moreover, the eclipse of Guzmanian ornamentation did

not mean a total discontinuation of work on public buildings, but rather a shift from the pompous urban edifice to the modest provincial one. After all, Gómez was a sort of country bourgeois (Caraballo, 1981: 19-32, 51; Carrera Damas, 1988: 113; Martín, 1994: 127-28; 272-78).

29. The Venezuelan doctors and the United States were very keen on Gómez's progressive programme, and they were actually to remain good allies for its final completion. While encouraging the government to take on its official responsibility in sanitation, the doctors championed a crusade aimed at committing the private sector in the field of "social hygiene". Rísquez had been a pioneer in this respect, when proposing a municipal body to tackle poverty and prostitution, by combining the efforts of both official assistance and private charities (1909: 267-74). In the following years, the latter increased their participation in public programmes such as "la gota de leche", while the first clinics inspired by European models were welcomed as another contribution from private medicine, led by Razetti and Guevara Rojas (ECI, XX, 473, 1-IX-1911: 500-501; 476, 15-X-1911: 586). In 1912 there was constituted a league against tuberculosis, and the following year Razetti launched the Liga Venezolana de Higiene Social, based on the example of the international associations he had joined in the 1900s. The Venezuelan savant then established neat distinctions between the official sector's responsibility in sanitation and the private mission in social hygiene:

"Las grandes obras de saneamiento como las cloacas, los acueductos, los pavimentos y la lucha contra las enfermedades epidémicas corresponden a los Poderes Públicos y se hacen con el dinero de la Nación, pero la obra de la higiene social, tal como se entiende hoy esta rama de las ciencias sanitarias, derivan en todas partes de la iniciativa privada y se sostiene y fomenta con el dinero de los particulares" (Razetti, 1952, II: 593-94)



Razetti thus transplanted the pre-urbanistic concept coming from 1900s Europe to Venezuelan society, in order to deal with popular diseases and social plagues - like alcoholism, poverty and prostitution - which were beyond the government's responsibility, since they were due to social disparities, vices and deficiencies in the private domain (Archila, 1952: 183).

As a part of the new crusade, between 1914 and 1915 Razetti published another series of articles in *El Universal*, in which he appealed to the example of the new apostles of sanitary campaigns: the North Americans. Trying to demonstrate the basic principles of "higiene aplicada" in relation to "aseo personal", Razetti traced back the Europeans' "tradicional" dirtiness to its medieval origins, dramatized by the examples of Spanish monarchs like Isabel La Católica, Fernando VI or Felipe II - who could keep the same underwear or bedclothes for up to one year, as a way of accomplishing ascetic vows for gaining Granada or overcoming sorrows. Razetti thereby portrayed personal hygiene as a modern conquest by the Americans:

"El aseo personal, como la limpieza de las habitaciones y de las ciudades, son conquistas del siglo XIX. En la obra de la higiene personal han desempeñado un papel muy importante los americanos del Norte, que han enseñado a los europeos a bañarse diariamente como lo hacen ellos en su país. De poco tiempo a esta parte es que en los grandes hoteles de París hay baños suficientes. En los Estados Unidos los baños sobran y son de primer orden" (Razetti, 1952, II: 607-608).

By those years, ECI also reported that between 25 and 30% of the urban population of "la poderosa Albión" lived under the poverty line, while Chicago was proclaimed as the metropolis with the lowest mortality-rate in the world, thanks to Dr Evans's wonders as head of the local office of

sanitation (ECI, XX, 476, 15-X-1911: 593; XXIII, 532, 15-II-1914: 120).

The Americans had become the new reference for sanitation and progress in Gómez's Venezuela, as well as for personal cleanliness. Indeed, the War had forced Venezuelans and the rest of Latin Americans to seek in the United States the medical advice they previously had received from Europe; the result was a "better acquaintance and sincere liking and admiration for American institutions and methods" - as Commissioner Bell reported to his country (1922: 23-24). At the same time, the United States cared about the health panorama of the Caribbean nation because of its growing provisions of Venezuelan oil. In this context, the Americans' best ambassador to Venezuela was the Rockefeller Foundation, which sponsored nationwide programmes against yellow fever and malaria in the 1910s and 1930s. Innovations in sanitary administration were also exchanged with the rest of Latin America, where the Foundation and the Conferencias Interamericanas had long since encouraged national and federal governments to boost municipal efforts (*Conferencias*, 1938, I: 244; Archila, 1956, I: 180-84; Wilson, 1972: 16, 326). Probably as a result of Razetti's campaigns and American sponsorship, the etiquette manuals used in contemporary schools - such as Reyes Zumeta's *Rudimentos de Urbanidad e Higiene* (1923) - started to include final sections devoted to the dangers of polluted water, and the ways of preventing yellow fever, tuberculosis and typhus, among other diseases.

30. The pending problem of the quality of the Caracas water supply was a good example of how the efforts of the government, the private sector and the Americans were put together to improve sanitary conditions. The year

after Gómez's rise to power, Razetti had already urged the new government to assume the great works of sanitation for Caracas, as it had traditionally assumed its ornamental works: "por los mismos motivos que el Tesoro de la Nación atiende a la construcción de Teatros, Palacios, Paseos, etc., debe también construir las cloacas, los acueductos y el pavimento de las calles de la Capital, asiento de los Poderes Generales de la República" (Razetti, 1952, II: 171).

Despite the relatively salubrious conditions of the DF - which had hastily been proclaimed as "inmejorables" by the governor, thanks to Gómez's efforts - the Congreso de Municipalidades reminded Caraquenians that the mortality quotient still was "casi el doble de lo permitido por la higiene" - a syndrome still exacerbated by the water problem (GMDF, 14-V-1910; *Actas*, 1913: 45). Since the liquid was not drinkable even by the 1910s, Razetti published another series of articles in *El Universal*: taking examples from Hamburg, Vienna, Zurich and Philadelphia, he explained all the necessary stages of purification, adduction and storage, whereby the Caracas water system would become worthy of a "verdadera ciudad moderna" (Razetti, 1952, II: 595-606).

In 1915 the government bought the land of Macarao, site of the wellspring, whose acquisition had been suggested by Razetti as the first step towards solving the problem of the contamination of the Caraquenian sources (Razetti, 1952, II: 597). Even so, the filtering problem of the water continued in the terms explained by Bell to the American diplomats:

"foreigners are always cautioned not to use it for drinking purposes on account of the danger of typhoid and other diseases. An English company, the Venezuelan Potable Water Co., of Caracas, supplies filtered water in 5-

gallon bottles such as are used for filters in the United States, and this water is mostly used for drinking purposes in the leading hotels, pensions, residences of the better class, clubs, etc" (Bell, 1922: 120).

In view of these restrictions, in 1926 the Rockefeller Foundation sent the engineer Thorndike Saville, who stayed in the country for nine months. Apart from reorganizing the Ingeniería Sanitaria of the Oficina de Sanidad Nacional, the Professor from the University of North Carolina developed proposals for the improvement of the quality of Caraqueñan water. Thinking of other Latin cities with similar problems, Saville foresaw great prospects for North American engineering in the South, which he commented on in 1927 to his colleagues of the New England Water Works Association:

"A los ingenieros norteamericanos se ofrecerán en lo futuro muchas oportunidades de trabajar en la elaboración de proyectos y en la construcción de obras modernas de abastecimiento de agua para esas ciudades. Muy pocos de los ingenieros de la América del Sur reciben su educación en los Estados Unidos y la práctica de la ejecución de obras hidráulicas se funda en gran parte sobre teorías expuestas en obras de texto francés. Sin duda que eventualmente se abrirá en esos países un campo de acción en el campo de obras hidráulicas con provecho mutuo de los ingenieros sudamericanos y contratistas de los Estados Unidos." (Saville, 1933).

Saville was right, at least in relation to the fact that the American took over from the French in the sanitation of Gómez's Venezuela. The issue of personal cleanliness and the sanitary sponsorship offered by the Colossus moved the home of hygiene from the Old into the New Continent. If France stood as the intellectual mother of Razetti's youth - as he often recognized - the United States came to be the scientific magnet of the late Gómez era. After all, by 1931 Razetti transmitted "con toda comodidad" his "Semanas

Sanitarias" from the microphones of the YV1BC Broadcasting Caracas - which had been launched in May 1926 with American technology (Archila, 1952: 39; Razetti, 1952, II: 611-16).

"Gómez did not like Caracas. He couldn't conquer it. He satisfied himself by ruling it and, on occasions, punishing it".

Thomas Rourke, *Tyrant of the Andes* (1937)

## CARACAS REBUFFED

31. When he joined Castro for the Revolución Restauradora in 1899, Gómez's only stay beyond the Venezuelan Andes had been as an exile on the Colombian border, where he had managed his own hacienda called *Buenos Aires* - probably the most contact *compadre* Juan had with the idea of a big city, apart from his commercial visits to Cúcuta. Furthermore - as Thomas Rourke put it in *Tyrant of the Andes* - the rustic condor perhaps "had no sympathy for cities" when he left his Andean nest; in any case, Caracas was still the remote place which had been referred to since his austere childhood - just as remote as the sea used to be for most of Andeans (Rourke, 1937, 69; Velásquez, 1979: 71). But disappointment came to him on the very night of October 22, 1899, while the troops of the revolution camped out in the city centre and the caudillos greeted the crowd.

"From his first arrival, that night when he stood in the plaza by the statue of Bolívar, in his ruana and alpargatas, watching the lights of the coaches circling the square, Gómez had been vaguely baffled by this city. There was something about it that evaded him, annoyed him. He couldn't grasp it, make it his, as he could with everything else that he encountered. This was too

subtle for him" (Rourke, 1937: 141).

Probably too subtle, also, was the French menu served to the Andean generals during the first dinner they were offered in the Casa Amarilla - the presidential palace of Caracas - which started with "Potage crème d'asperges" and finished with "Glace vanille" and assorted "pâtisserie" (Picón Salas, 1991: 116). Though captivating the American visitors at that time, the *belle-époque* ethos of the Paris of South America just bewildered the plain countryman, who always remained nostalgic for life in the mountains. In addition, during Castro's presidency, the Caraqueñan bourgeoisie never paid much attention to General Gómez's achievements in public administration or military campaigns; neither did Don Juan Vicente enjoy the parties offered by the courteous elite to El Cabito. On the contrary, Gómez just increased his country's mistrust of flatterers from the capital, who always regarded him as a "barbarian" (Rourke, 1937: 143; Lavin, 1954: 129; Velásquez, 1979: 97, 203, 303).

This original apprehension was overtaken by manifest antipathy as soon as he became president: though Caracas remained as the official capital, in April 1909, Gómez decided to move his headquarters to Maracay - a provincial town 110 kms from the capital. But the dictator could not prevent the "sun-baked town" from soon becoming "a local Potsdam", where Lady Mills could confirm that Gómez's entourage was worthy of a tropical Louis XIV (1930: 19, 22). The Maracay court was visited by the ambassadors of European monarchies, who decorated the Benemérito's breast with medals sent by royal households, in order to get oil concessions. The foreign ministers of France, the United States and other powers were provided with splendid villas in the exclusive area of Las Delicias; they became so fond of

the prodigal dictator that they were even dubbed by the international press as "the lovers of Gómez" (Lavin, 1954: 172-73). Although the dictator's own mistresses and children were sent off for lavish seasons in France, Lapeyre made it clear that the Benemérito - whose existence was "un modèle de simplicité et de laborieuse persévérance" - was not to blame for the opulence of his court: "Villas, autos, bijoux, toilettes sont les stigmates apparents de l'heureuse aisance dans laquelle s'ébattent ceux qui l'entourent ..." (1937: 10). Perhaps the grateful biographer was just trying to render thanks for the three years he had spent as a guest in the "Versailles vénézuélienne".

32. Despite having been rebuffed by the dictator, upper-class Caraqueñians went on with their *belle-époque* extravaganzas, while the new oil revenue fuelled a cosmopolitanism perceived by diplomats and visitors. The Cuban Minister to Caracas noticed that in the mansions of El Paraíso, domestic life was no longer so traditional as in other Latin American households: "Se ha viajado, se reciben trajes de París, se preparan para las comidas y los bailes" (Acevedo, 1940: 37). Lady Mills had the same impression when she was invited to a round of parties and dancing, bridge and sight-seeing with the sophisticated bourgeoisie of El Paraíso, where not only Venezuelans but also Britons and French, Germans and Americans managed "a pleasant and interesting life, and extremely cosmopolitan" (1930: 16). They all longed for the arrival of the Caracas Carnival, whose popularity attracted many American tourists; then Marie Antoinette and Pierrot became the most popular fancy costumes borrowed from the European mythology - apart from the creole versions of Odalisques. The décor of the fiesta was made vivid with pavilions which reproduced architectural motifs from around the world,

including a 20-m-high wooden replica of the Eiffel tower - which actually stayed in front of the Cathedral for some years (Cortina, 1976: 145-49). After the Carnival - as Lapeyre confirmed - "les Vénézuéliens eux-mêmes, qui en ont la possibilité, s'absentent vers les États-Unis et l'Europe; c'est désormais à Paris, à Vichy ou sur la Côte d'Azur qu'on a les plus de chances de les rencontrer jusqu'à l'arrivée des premiers froids qui les chasse" (1937: 242)

Orchestrated by France, Europe informed a great deal of the ethos of the late *belle époque* in Caracas. The capital's two most luxurious shops for women's fashion were still *La Compagnie Française* and *Liverpool*, while *El Louvre* was the main drapers' store. The 2,000-page catalogue of *Le Bon Marché* was not only received in most of these top shops, but was also delivered to private houses (García de la Concha, 1962: 224; Schael, 1966: 151; Muñoz, 1970: 25). The cinema had been introduced in the late 1900s, with film projectors devised by the French "Casa Pathé", which screened documentaries where speechless Caraqueñians saw the sights of Parisian boulevards and other highlights of the capital of the *belle époque* (Cortina, 1973: 83-86, 187-88). In 1917, Ana Pavlova danced at the Municipal theatre, while the Italian Leopoldo Fregoli performed in drag in his "Paris Concert" at the Veroes Coliseum (Salas, 1974: 122-23, 130-31). Coming out of the theatres, Caraqueñians could relish so-called "pan francés" in *Las Gradillas* bakery, or listen to French music in trendy new places, such as the *Tea Room Avila* and the *Hotel Majestic*, built in the late 1920s (Schael, 1978: 20-27)

Picturesqueness and exoticism were added to the tropical evening of the "bella época caraqueña". There were 21 resident toreros who demonstrated the revival of bull-fighting in the capital, which was provided with a neo-



Mudejar bullring - the Nuevo Circo, built in the grounds of the former slaughterhouse. In their parade to the Benemérito's court in Maracay, Spanish toreros and *cupletistas* - led by Raquel Meller - enlivened the Andalusian ethos of the Latin capital. Commercial variety was enriched by the traditional presence of so-called "turcos", the name given by Caraquenians to all newcomers from the domains of the former Ottoman Empire, from Eastern Europeans to Arabs; most of them were in fact Lebanese immigrants who imported diverse French produce (García de la Concha, 1962: 177). As in the books of Salgari, Doyle and Verne - which were easy to find in the central markets - the Oriental and European myths mingled in snobbish pastimes: following Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb, Caraquenians' eccentricities included the creation of the "Culto de Osiris", a comical sect which added an Egyptian touch to the exoticism of 1920s Caracas (Muñoz, 1970: 97-98; Nazoa, 1977: 202; Mislé, 1986: 77).

33. The replacement of the languid imagery of the *belle époque* was speeded up by the growing presence of North American novelties in the Gómez capital. Caraquenians' cultural preoccupation with American wonders started in the early 1910s, when the first aeroplane which traversed the sky of Caracas was flown from Philadelphia by Boland, whose landing in the El Paraíso racecourse was cheered by elegant women of the best society. By those years, the skyscrapers of New York were being proclaimed in ECI as the biggest buildings in the world (ECI, XX, 458, 15-I-111: 65; 476, 15-X-1911: 583) New York's takeover from the European metropolises was made easy after World War I, when Bell could proclaim the new cultural dependence of the Gómez elite:

"The Mecca of the Venezuelan travellers is no longer Paris, London or Hamburg, but New York, and young men are being sent to the United States in increasing numbers for higher education and instruction in the sciences. Over half of the people of the better class that one meets in Venezuela are either talking about their recent trip to New York and the United States or are planning to go there in the near future for a tour, business, or education" (Bell, 1922: 23-24).

With the dollars provided by the oil business and the opening of the National City Bank in Caracas in 1917, the Rockefellers and the Phelps flooded Gómez's prosperous bourgeoisie with radios, RCA Victor phonographs, Kodak cameras, model T Fords, and other novelties imported from the United States. Drinking whiskey and dancing to American melodies played on 78-r.p.m. "pick-ups", the bourgeoisie not only danced tropical rhythms such as rumba and merengue, but also listened to American jazz and swung to the charleston and foxtrot (Pino Iturrieta, 1988: 62-64; Toro, 1993: 237; Meneses, 1995: 139). As the Cuban Minister witnessed during the fiestas offered to celebrate Don Fernando of Bavaria's visit to the Caracas of the roaring 20s, even the Infante of Spain and cousin of Alfonso XIII more than once took part in the foxtrot fad when stepping onto the dance floor (Acevedo, 1940: 144). Less convulsive and more sophisticated, the tango furore would be brought to a climax by Carlos Gardel's visit in 1935.

With films starring debonair John Barrymore, or silent cow-boy movies, Hollywood did the rest. Since the early 1910s, the boom of cinematography in Caracas had made the public concerned about the establishment of a censorship committee, like that working in Berlin; an ordinance was finally passed in 1919 (ECI, XXII, 15-II-1913: 105-106; GMDF, 4-VII-1919). By then, Yankee films and sports had captured the attention of Caraqueñians as

mass spectacles. The cult of the movies was presided over by the dictator himself, who took a "naïve pleasure" at the showings in his private cinema in Maracay - as Lady Mills was able to observe (1930: 21; Velásquez, 1979: 307-308). Meanwhile, as hypnotized spectators at the Caracas theatres put chewing-gum in their mouths, the glamour of the "bella época caraqueña" was brought to an end (Muñoz, 1972: 9). After an economic siege which had started in the nineteenth century, the Americans finally seemed to win the last cultural battle for the Paris of South America; however, the Parisian myth would keep a last card up French urbanism's sleeve - as we shall see in the next chapter.

"¡Una niña de dieciocho años, sola, de su cuenta, en una capital como ésa! ¡Qué disparate! ¡Qué peligro! ¡Cuando lo pienso!... Y no te figures que aquí en Caracas puedes hacer lo mismo..."

María Eugenia's grandmother, in Teresa de la Parra's *Ifigenia* (1924)

## MARIA EUGENIA AND VICTORIA

34. The rebuff to their capital was especially felt by Caraquenians with aspirations beyond the narrow horizons of the dictatorial regime, and the conflict was displayed once again in the literary realism of the Gómez era - as the frustration over the false modernity of Caracas had appeared in literary modernism. In José Rafael Pocaterra's *Memorias de un venezolano de la decadencia* (1927) - a vivid manifesto against the dictatorial repression, written from the dungeons of La Rotunda, the main prison of Gómez's Caracas - the author traced back the authoritarian conservatism to 1909, when the novelist Blanco Fombona was jailed for his early criticisms of

the status quo. According to Pocaterra's vitriolic denouncement of the pseudo-progressive regime, Gómez's bureaucrats thought that "la civilización es hablar por teléfono o poseer un automóvil más grande que la casa en que habitan"; for that reason, the Caracas of these philistines could not help but be an obscure and spurious city, far away from true modernization:

"Todo es postizo, afectado, falso, desde las modas de la 'Compañía Francesa' hasta las maneras de pensar. En semejante medio, naturalmente los ojos molestos, la censura acerba y el querer romper la ventana para que entre la luz del sol, si no se puede abrir, destrozando las cortinas polvorientas y tirando a la calle las alfombras inútiles llenas de microbios, resulta odioso y antipático. Qué quieren esos forajidos? Qué pretenden? ... Que Caracas no sea un pequeño París? Que la gente no sepa de toros y de ópera? Que un ministro y un gobernador sean tratatados sin adjetivos convenientes? Y la sociedad? Y el general Gómez?" (Pocaterra, 1966, II: 42).

The cosmopolitan pretensions of the petty Paris of the tropics were also denied by María Eugenia Alonso - the protagonist of Teresa de la Parra's *Ifigenia* (1924) - when she returned to the sleepy capital after many years of Parisian education. If Alberto Soria dramatized the cultural frustration of intellectuals in the post-Guzmanian city, María Eugenia was to incarnate the sacrifice of the young cosmopolitan woman in Gómez's Caracas. When revisiting for the first time the centre of the capital with her grandmother, María Eugenia could not perceive any lively trace in the alleged Paris of South America; instead, the Caracas of her memories only "resultaba ser aquella ciudad chata, una especie de ciudad andaluza, de una Andalucía melancólica, sin mantón de Manila ni castañuelas, sin guitarras ni coplas, sin macetas y sin flores en las rejas... ¡una Andalucía soñolienta que se

había adormecido bajo el bochorno de los trópicos..." (Parra, 1986, I: 76).

Not only its physical image, but also the social panorama of Gómez's Caracas seemed flat and gloomy against María Eugenia's European background. As soon as the young woman came to live with her grandmother, the latter was horrified at the fact that María Eugenia had been on her own in Paris, and prevented her from behaving in the same way in Caracas (Parra, 1986, I: 194). In a city where boredom sometimes turned out to be the stigma of the generation which had grown up under the dictatorship, señoritas were often calumniated if they did not seem properly behaved, especially since elderly people were suspicious of the pernicious influences of French magazines and literature (Cortina, 1976: 189, 194). Besides restraining her personal freedom, the fashionable heroine had to moderate her avant-garde style in a capital where women could never attain the same Parisian "chic" (Parra, 1986, I: 119). Since 1911, ECI had certainly featured Europe's new tendencies in female fashions, from the polemical "falda pantalón" wore by Parisian women, to the English tailored suits and spring dresses inspired by the Liberty style. But María Eugenia belonged to the trendier generation of young ladies who wore kimonos at home, had their hair cut *à la garçonne*, and no longer read Lamartine but Bourget and Colette. However - as happened in many modest and decent houses in Caracas - the roaring 20s had not yet arrived to the conservative home of María Eugenia's grandmother (Meneses, 1966: 202; Liscano, 1979: 863). That is why she decided to write the "Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se fastidiaba" - the appropriate subtitle of de la Parra's novel.

35. From diverse perspectives, the same overall flatness of Gómez's

Caracas was confirmed by the young generation who opposed the dictatorial regime. In the deadly silence of this capital, Gómez's executioners had tortured to death about 157 political prisoners between 1913 and 1919, according to Pocaterra's calculations from La Rotunda (1966, III: 104). Even though Nietzsche's philosophy and Wilde's *Salome* were welcomed in those years in ECI, the cultural mediocrity imposed by the dictatorship was the origin of the anguish which annihilated Rómulo Gallegos's *Reinaldo Solar* (1921), an intellectual who died soon after his futile experience as an urban guerrilla. Some concessions were certainly obtained after the students' rebellion in 1928 - the year when Caraquénian theatres featured Shaw's *Pygmalion* and Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (Salas, 1974: 170). But dissident students and trade unionists had to keep on conspiring clandestinely, till they were finally captured and sent to concentration camps, as happened to the characters of Miguel Otero Silva's *Fiebre* (1939); even in captivity, they continued exchanging Communist manifestos and other books which inflamed their belief in the socialist utopia, such as Upton Sinclair's novels, which were banned from Caraquénian book shops (Otero Silva, 1994: 117-18). That was why Alberto Rengifo - a young dissident poet who was jailed by the dictator in Laureano Vallenilla Lanz hijo's *Allá en Caracas* (1948) - yearned to take his beloved muse to Venice or Florence, far away from the "ambiente chato y mediocre" of Gómez's Caracas (1954: 70).

This escapism was even shared by some comfortable members of the Gómez bourgeoisie, who did not miss any chance of embarking for the Old Continent in one of the chic liners: the *Versailles* - of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique - or the *Venetia* - of the Hamburg-Amerika Linie. Not only the newlyweds before their honeymoon, but all the members of

Pocaterra's *La casa de los Abila* (1921-22) offered splendid balls when they departed for their season in Europe, when the *tout* Caracas celebrated and coveted at the same time the troupe's tour (Cortina, 1971: 178; Misle, 1981: 50). As soon as they were introduced to one another, the well-travelled children of Vallenilla Lanz hijo's novel made out of speaking English and French, or out of knowing London and Paris, an index of social status (1954: 137-38). This status was certainly not reached by Antonia Palacio's *Ana Isabel, una niña decente* (1949), who wept inconsolably when her middle-class family could not afford to import a dress from Paris for her First Communion (1989: 52). And the collective delirium of fleeing Gómez's dull capital was fuelled by eccentric and decadent diplomats, who seductively evoked a Europe of preciousness, modelled on the imagery of D'Annunzio and Wilde - whose works were staged in Caracas in 1924 (Vallenilla Lanz hijo, 1954: 52-53; Salas, 1974: 162).

In the midst of such an *ennui*, Mercedes Galindo and others of María Eugenia's friends encouraged her to go back to Europe, as most of them would actually do. The Andalusian air of Gómez's Caracas was not European enough for some of the cosmopolitan personae of these novels, who suffered not only the dictator's rebuff to the capital, but also their own sacrifice in its provincality. Nevertheless, some other characters stayed and took on this reality as their own - which set a difference between the conflicts of this literary realism and the evasive modernism of the past (Picón Salas, 1984: 184). In this respect, the true hero of Pocaterra's novel turned out to be Juan Abila, who faced, alone, the final bankruptcy of his snobbish family; the young man had long since cursed the spurious effects of European civilization on his native city, which he never abandoned for frivolous tours (Pocaterra, 1991: 206). For the same reasons, María Eugenia's uncle had

long since repudiated the transatlantic ships which linked Caracas with Paris (Parra, 1986, I: 68). Surprisingly, the creole Iphigenia herself would sacrifice her Parisian dreams to the chimera of Gómez's Caracas: on the dawn agreed on with her lover for their furtive escape to Europe, María Eugenia's scruples made her linger around her grandmother's house, until daybreak made any departure impossible. By those years, *A Doll's House* had been staged in Caracas - but de la Parra's heroine was not Ibsen's Nora.

36. Unlike María Eugenia Alonso, when Victoria Guanipa - the heroine of Gallegos's *La Trepadora* (1925) - arrived for the first time in Caracas, she was excited with the lively capital of the oil-exporter country. Having been brought up in an hacienda of inland Venezuela, Victoria obviously lacked María Eugenia's urban breeding, so the former could not pretend to be disappointed with Gómez's capital. Neither did Victoria feel so restrained when staying with her grandmother - as María Eugenia did - despite her new American acquaintances claiming that New York was the only city which allowed women's emancipation. But the most significant difference between the two young señoritas - who arrived in the same city in the same years - was the fact that María Eugenia's Caracas was still ruled by Paris, while Victoria was already bearing in mind New York as the ultimate metropolis which Caracas could aspire to be like (Gallegos, 1982: III, iii, vii, x).

After the *costumbristas'* portrayal of hasty Caraquenians returning from North America, a more updated picture of the myth of New York in the personae of the Gómez era can be found in the childish memories of the narrator of *Allá en Caracas*:

"Para mí, Nueva York era entonces un lugar misterioso y feérico del que



tornaban los compatriotas con chaquetas demasiado amplias, pantalones demasiado angostos, corbatas de lazos, zapatos brillantes amarillo canario y sombreros de paja con cintas de colores chillones. Al verlos pasar así vestidos, las gentes murmuraban llenas de admiración:

-‘Esos vienen de Nueva York!’

“Venir de Nueva York significaba también mascar chicle, hablar por las narices y tener sobre la mesa de noche una estatuita de la Libertad, adquirida en Times Square.

“Regresar de allá implicaba, además, saber mucho de ‘Base Ball’ y servir de árbitro en los torneos de tennis y los boxeos que se organizaban esporádicamente en nuestra capital.” (Vallenilla Lanz hijo, 1954: 77).

Furthermore, a season of exile in New York and other American cities also proved to be a good experience for the opponents of the Gómez regime. To cool off their juvenile rebelliousness, some deserters of *Fiebre* were sent to study in New York or Boston; they returned to Venezuela as straightforward professionals, dressed “al estilo Oxford” and humming American jingles (Otero Silva, 1994: 223-24). Some others did not manage to succeed in the babel of Northern metropolises, however. This happened to the poet Alberto Rengifo, who finally became one of Gómez’s exiles in New York - and not in romantic Italy, as he had originally wished. Like many other Venezuelans, Alberto used to envy “los compatriotas que regresaban de Estados Unidos con humos de superioridad, dentro de indumentarias fabricadas para cuerpos atléticos de gringos”; but once he had gone through the miseries of the metropolis “de rascacielos cubiertos de brumas”, the penniless artist wrote to his friends in Caracas: “No duden de mi sinceridad si les digo que echo de menos la vida campesina de Los Chorros y los aires yodados y tibios de Macuto” (Vallenilla Lanz hijo, 1954: 80-81).

Despite Alberto Rengifo’s disappointment in New York, the literary personae

of the late Gómez era seemed to be more at their ease with the progressive myth of the Northern metropolis. Though they traversed the same city in the same years, Victoria's Caracas seemed to depend more upon the progress due to American cars and movies, while María Eugenia's still languished for the European mythology of the late *belle époque*. The two heroines' attitudes towards their urban destiny were also different: while Gómez's Caracas represented the sacrifice of a mediocre marriage for the creole Iphigenia, Victoria was finally redeemed from her provincial complex by an upright husband who passed over the snobberies of the capital. This ambivalence illustrated another of the urban paradoxes of Gómez's Venezuela: in spite of being the yesterday for travellers returning from foreign metropolises, 1920s Caracas represented the relative today for provincials arriving from Venezuelan towns, which were still stuck in the nineteenth century (Meneses, 1966: 199-202; Liscano, 1979: 868).

"Estamos en Los Chorros. Las calles de la urbanización apenas si han sido trazadas por el propietario impaciente de parcelar y vender. Al venir las lluvias, se transformarán en canales de aguas rojizas donde echaremos a navegar cáscaras de huevos y barcos de papel."

Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, hijo, *Alá en Caracas* (1948)

## TRAFFIC, URBAN SPRAWL AND HOUSING

37. With an estimated population of 92,212 by 1920, Gómez's rebuffed Caracas stayed far behind the major Latin American capitals which had topped 100,000 by the turn of the twentieth century. The demographic growth of the administrative capital was merely natural, in an agriculture-

oriented country with no real urban primacy, when it was not yet flooded with significant waves of rural or international immigration (Roberts, 1978: 48; Carvallo and Hernández, 1983: 29-30). With the total number of houses just having risen from 13,349 in 1891 to 13,476 in 1920, a dramatic proof of the physical stagnation of this capital was the proliferation of the aforementioned "corralones" or "casas de vecindad" - the characteristic setting for most of the social plagues denounced by Razetti and other Venezuelan doctors. Reaching an average density of 18 inhabitants per house, about 410 hovels of this type sheltered 7,533 people by 1916 - namely 10% of the capital's estimated population at that time (Acosta Saignes, 1967: 652, 775, 878; Perna, 1981: 110-12; Morales Tucker and others, 1990: 51-52, 91). Most of them were workers and immigrants who spread across the centre of late-1910s Caracas the ethos of a Pío Baroja novel (Schael, 1958: 202-203).

However, the capital of the oil-exporter country soon started to evince a demographic recovery: with population jumping to 135,253 by 1926, the relative increase between 1920 and 1926 amounted to 39.48% - a considerable change in relation to the 22.86% growth between 1891 and 1920 (*Quinto Censo*, 1926, III: 841; MF, *Sexto Censo*, 1936, I: 19). Epitomizing the functional and social segregation of the 1920s capital, the traditional centre underwent further densification of commerce and other services due to the new economic activities (Stann, 1975: 177-87; Geigel, 1976: 47). By those years, the new oil revenue and the payment of Venezuela's international debts paved the way for the Gómez administration to lift the so-called "castigo de Caracas" (Negrón, 1991: 147). In terms of infrastructure, the electric service of the capital was extended to the point that the distribution of posts in the streets had to be regulated by the local government. With a new system of concrete sewers started in 1919,

aqueducts being repaired and streets being paved, the infrastructure conditions of the capital were apparently satisfactory, at least according to the American Commissioner's report (Bell, 1922: 31, 121; GMDF, 9-XII-1926; 1-X-1924, 26-VII-1932, *Digesto Municipal*, 1939: 133-40, 287-95). But three pending questions - which were more than mere ameliorations on infrastructure - were to characterize the urban agenda of Gómez's redeemed Caracas: traffic, urban sprawl and housing. Let us glance through them separately.

38. The appearance of the automobile had been a wonderful present from the twentieth century to the sombre streets of Caracas. Though initially imported from Paris for Doña Zoila during the early *belle époque*, the "carro" - as it is still called by Venezuelans - was to become a device associated with the Americans' patronage of Gómez's progressivism. By the 1910s, the new fetish was already worshipped by the so-called "generación Ford" of Caraqueños, who were to constitute an Automobile Club intended to promote the car as a the main vehicle for transport, tourism and sport. From Maracay to Caracas and vice versa, Gómez and his ministers paraded in luxurious American cars, led by a Lincoln proffered by President Herbert Hoover to the Benemérito (Schael, 1966: 176; 1968: 104; Nazoa, 1977: 228). By the early 1920s, Bell considered that "the only active competition to be expected by American automobile manufactures in the Venezuelan market" was from German or Italian cars - the latter being popularized by the first Fiat agency in Caracas (1922: 356). But French cars were wiped out from Gómez's new thoroughfares, according to Lapeyre's own statement: "Les marques sont toutes américaines; les voitures françaises, qui furent pourtant les premières introduites au Vénézuéla avec la Dion, le Planchard,

la Lorraine, ont disparu et sont remplacées aujourd'hui par des automobiles Ford, Chevrolet, Buick, Packard et Lincoln, etc." (1937: 76).

Partly as a response to the priority conferred on the means of communication by the Gómez administration, the number and diversity of motor vehicles grew considerably both in Caracas and nationwide. In proportion to the population of the country, Lafond reckoned that the number of automobiles travelling through Venezuelan roads "dépasse sensiblement celui de plusieurs grandes nations européennes" (1927: 39). By the mid-1920s, in Caracas alone there were 1,067 licenses for the "chauffeurs" for over 1,000 private automobiles, plus 100 automobiles for hire. In addition, there were 816 licenses for carriages, 158 for trams, 65 for public buses - which had appeared in 1912 - and 1,900 licenses for carts (Bell, 1922: 223; Schael, 1969: 199).

Before the car revolution, post-Guzmanian administrations were rather concerned about public transport for the sake of the civilization of the capital. Even at the end of the century, the Inspectoría de Coches, Carros y Tranvías - which had reported yearly to the GDF since the mid-1890s - demanded for a new ordinance in relation to the carriage service, because this was not in correspondence with the Caraquenians' level of civilization (GDF, *Memoria*, 1899: 43-44). On the eve of Castro's departure, the DL government enacted a *Reglamento de tranvías, automóviles, velocípedos y carros* (CMDf, 13-V-1908). But Gómez's progressive administration had to be quicker in passing new instruments aimed at tackling the growing problems of Caraquenian traffic for the sake of circulation in itself. A new *Reglamento de Coches, Automóviles, Tranvías, Velocípedos, Motocicletas, Camiones y Carros* was issued by the DL in 1913; one year later, another *Reglamento* established

further controls on the circulation of cars and minibuses, given the narrowness of most Caraquenian streets (CMDF, 17-29-V-1913; 4-VIII-1914). During the 1920s, local instruments increasingly tightened the controls: the 1920 *Ordenanza sobre Coches, Tranvías, Automóviles, Carros, Biciclos, etc., etc.*, was followed by similar ordinances in 1922 and 1924, which thereafter embraced the rest of the DF (CMDF, 3-VIII-1920; 13-IX-1922; 12-VI-1924, 7-VIII-1924). The 1927 *Ordenanza sobre Tráfico Urbano de Vehículos* restricted cars to circulating at a maximum speed of 25 km/h, and buses and trucks at 20, whilst motorcycles were allowed up to 30 km/h; senses and rules for circulation were officially established, while parking was banned from some corners of the jammed centre (arts. 30-32, CMDF, 30-VII-1927). Further restrictions on these aspects were established until a new *Ordenanza sobre Circulación Urbana de Vehículos* was passed in 1931 (CMDF, 3-I-1931). Its successor of 1933 demonstrated how congested the centre of the oil-exporter capital came to be: the first traffic wardens were entitled to enforce a maximum speed of 20 km/h in cars and 10 in motorcycles, which should even slow down when approaching the corners - some of which had been rounded off since 1924 (arts. 74, 103-105, CMDF, 28-IX-1933).

39. The enlargement of the capital had been a pending question for Caraquenians since the late nineteenth century. The southwestern El Paraíso and the northern residential buds distinguished by Alberto Soria from El Calvario configured a panorama of incipient yet uncontrolled extension - a problem which already worried the municipal engineer E. Gómez Franco in his 1896 report to the GDF:

"Es urgente que la Municipalidad preste atención a este asunto y que

ordene la delineación de nuevas calles hacia las afueras de la ciudad, el estudio de las obras de arte indispensables para unirlos á las existentes, la formación, en fin, de un proyecto de ensanchamiento que satisfaga debidamente las exigencias de una ciudad que ha alcanzado ya la altura de Caracas, tanto por el aumento de su población como por el desarrollo de sus industrias" (GDF, *Memoria*, 1897: 261).

Like Alberto and the engineer, by the turn of the new century most Caraquenians still envisaged the southwest and the north as the most natural directions for the extension of their capital; nevertheless, the new sanitary consciousness was to change the engineer's artistic approach to the question as well as Alberto's prospects. In 1904 Ayala had already pointed out that facilities for water supply and disposal were major factors to be taken into account when selecting the ground for the extension of cities (1904: 6). But it was engineer Carlos F. Linares who - in a 1912 article published in the newly-created RTMOP - framed the problem of urban extension in the terms required by the new hygienical approach:

"La importancia del lugar donde debe fundarse una ciudad, así como aquel al cual deben extenderse las ya existentes, exige cuidado especial, pues debe atenderse para ello, en primer término, á la salubridad del punto que se escoja; lo que implica la facilidad de conseguir agua potable, sin gran costo, y suficiente para abastecer la población radicada y flotante que exista en la ciudad y sus alrededores, así como también para las industrias que se establezcan, riego de plazas y demás arboledas necesarias para el embellecimiento de éstas; á la facilidad del establecimiento de acueductos, cloacas y calles amplias y de poca pendiente; á la comodidad y economía de las construcciones; y en fin, á todo aquello que tienda á hacer saludable, cómoda y bella la ciudad y á facilitar el desarrollo de sus industrias." (Linares, 1912: 153).

In view of the aforementioned factors, the author considered that the

irregular grounds towards the north were not appropriate and advantageous for the extension of the capital, whereas the villages towards the east did satisfy the conditions “para delinear un pintoresco y uniforme ‘Nuevo Caracas’”. His choice thus stated, Linares then proceeded to justify it in terms of quality of the ground, facilities for buildings, salubrity, sewers and water supply, with an abundance of figures and technical vocabulary (1912: 153-56).

As a matter of fact, from the 1910s the car had allowed Caraquenians of the upper and middle classes to spend the summer holidays in “country” houses in those eastern villages, while keeping their “urban” residences in the centre - as is often described in the excursions and picnics of contemporary novels. But the extension towards the east was assumed as a more permanent option from the early 1920s, with the passage of a decree favouring the enlargement of Caracas towards the east, between the Guaire river and the so-called Carretera del Este (19-IV-1920, GDF, *Memoria*, 1921: 263-65). The decree officially boosted private developers' initiatives to urbanize former haciendas eastwards of the city - a concrete response to the necessity for upper and middle-class groups to escape from the deteriorated centre. By the 1920s, entrepreneurs like Luis Roche, Santiago Alfonzo Rivas and Juan Bernardo Arismendi thus undertook the construction of Maripérez, La Florida, El Recreo, Country Club, La Campiña, Campo Alegre, Los Palos Grandes, Los Chorros and Sebucán - all of them detached areas eastwards of the original centre.

In the eclectic *quintas* of these new *urbanizaciones*, a new group of architects who had studied abroad could experiment with the innovational eagerness of the prosperous bourgeoisie of the Gomezalato. The Spanish



Manuel Mujica Millán and Venezuelan Carlos Guinand Sandoz seduced their clients with "neo-colonial", "neobaroque" and "Basque" villas, as a chic re-creation of the so-called "mission style" from California, while Cipriano Domínguez and Gustavo Wallis designed the first "modern" cinemas and houses of Caracas, based on their tropical version of the "international style" and of "architectural cubism" (Gasparini and Posani, 1969: 302, 313-19; Pérez, 1995: 103). The eclecticism of a society which was changing its way of life was also evident in the interior decoration of the new villas and clubs. By the 1920s, Bell visited residences of the "wealthier classes" whose formal parlours were "like a French drawing-room, with high ceiling, heavy hangings, heavy lace curtains with tapestry over drapery, upholstered furniture and porcelain statuettes, great French-gilt pier mirrors, and the like..." (1922: 25). Some years later - during her visit to the golf course and the "excellent American bar" at the Country Club - Lady Mills joked about the odd combination of styles in one of the poshest venues of Gómez's Caracas: "golf clubs and cocktails seemed a quaint incongruity in a setting copied from an old Spanish monastery, lofty and dim, of dark mahogany and delicately coloured tiles" (1930: 16).

For some years more, El Paraíso continued to receive families from the congested centre, whose exodus was favoured by Gómez's new presents to the old suburb: the extension of tram lines and the construction of the Avenida 19 de Diciembre (Vera, 1995: 39-40). But the presents had ceased by the early 1930s, when E. Pardo Stolk complained about the insalubrity of the river Guaire as the main reason for the abandonment of El Paraíso as the main "ensanche lógico de Caracas"; sanitary works were needed in order to maintain the residential status of the area (1934: 1204). But the *belle-époque* suburb no longer set the path for the ground-breaking bourgeoisie:

after Linares's incorporation of hygienical and technical criteria into the analysis of the question, the Caraqueñan elite definitively migrated towards the east, but this time with a technical guarantee and an official approval. The Venezuelan capital thus broke a continental tradition of extension according to the first path of the upper-classes - a tradition respected by the more plutocratic capitals of Latin America until the 1930s, both in residential and commercial terms (Amato, 1970). The residential expansion towards the east was followed by that of the commercial activities, which reduced the central densification and broke the predominance of the north-south Calle del Comercio - which had remained as the main commercial axis since the time of Guzmanian visitors (Morales Tucker and others, 1990: 49-52). Producing a "patchwork pattern" which even today recalls the urban expansion of nineteenth-century London, the new eastern urbanizations were the first rampant examples of the interests of private enterprise in the development of the oil-exporter capital (Zawisza, 1985: 244; 1989: 22).

40. By the turn of the new century, Rísquez already knew that the problem of lower-class housing had long since become a major question in the urban agenda of Europe and North America. When explaining to the Sociedad de Ciencias de Málaga how to improve the hygienic conditions of the working-class environment, the Venezuelan consul encouraged Spaniards to constitute housing associations like those which were working out in London, Paris, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and even in Buenos Aires, all of which had succeeded in building low-cost dwellings according to hygienic and architectural standards (Rísquez, 1909: 40). But the Castro administration's only response to the problem apparently was the aforementioned mechanisms of exonerating builders from importation tax in

order to produce inexpensive housing. After Gómez's rise to power, other measures were adopted to improve the dwellings of the working class in the crowded city: in 1910, the GDF tried to control the hygienic conditions of tenements before they were rented. In 1913, a contract was signed with private developers to build "casas económicas e higiénicas para las clases obreras de esta ciudad" (GMDF, 4-I-1910; 9-VIII-1913). A new *Reglamento de Casas de Vecindad* passed in 1919 - updated in 1921 and 1926 - tackled the problem of tenement houses in the centre of the capital, which swarmed with newcomers (Acosta Saignes, 1967: 776-77).

The private developers also tried to satisfy the housing necessities of the working class. By the mid-1920s, Roche, Juan Bernardo Arismendi and others designed popular urbanizations which were an extension of the traditional layout, such as Los Caobos (1924) and the 400-unit development of San Agustín del Norte (1925) - whose advertisement as "El Ensanche" has associated it with Cerdá's theory (García, 1985: 44-48). At the same time, the unions which grouped the new contingents of urban workers became major customers for projects like the northern Nueva Caracas or the southern Prado de María, Los Cármenes and Los Jardines, which expanded the capital in different directions from those of the bourgeois east (Di Pasquo, 1985: 74). All these projects evinced the necessity of an official body which would sponsor the construction of low-cost housing for the growing demands of the working class in the booming capital.

The Gómez administration's formal response came in a presidential law issued in June 1928 - the year of the massive and violent revolt of the students of *Fiebre*. The Banco Obrero (BO) was thereupon provided with a significant capital to be invested in loans to "obreros pobres" who intended

to buy “casas de habitación urbanas”; official funds could also be spent on the construction of dwellings to be sold under a special hire-purchase regime to those workers (art. 6, *Ley de Banco Obrero*, GO 30-VI-1928). Although the original idea of José Ignacio Cárdenas - the MOP minister since 1927, who had stayed as a diplomat in Holland and France between 1920 and 1925 - was to increase the MOP budget for public housing, the new bank came to function as an official loaner (García, 1985: 20-24). Still, the BO soon attracted well-known entrepreneurs and designers such as Roche, Arismendi and Alfonzo Rivas to the development of significant projects in popular areas of Caracas; between the late 1920s and the early 1930s alone, the bank funded 200 houses in San Agustín del Sur, 35 houses in Catia, 95 in Agua Salud and 72 in Los Jardines de El Valle. Some of these projects have been regarded as local adaptations of England's new tendencies in suburban development, from the “by-law” houses to “garden suburbs” or “garden cities”; nevertheless, associations have only been established on the basis of the way the new projects were advertised, or on the mere fact that they were attempts to escape from the deteriorated centre (Pardo, 1969; García, 1985: 40-41, 51-52; Martín, 1995: 87).

The first official agency created in Latin America to face the problem of public housing, the BO thus represented a definite proof of Gómez's partial revocation of the punishment of the capital. Beyond the transitory reconciliation with the protesters of 1928, the BO dwellings marked a significant advance in the transformation of Venezuela's dictatorial regime into a welfare state (Martín, 1991: 77; 1995: 84-87). While motorcycles and automobiles were stuck in the the jammed centre of the city, public housing was given an institutional platform and the urban sprawl of Caracas was released on parole.

41. Gómez's legal apparatus for the city included more than the creation of the BO and the enactment of traffic ordinances. The aforementioned laws on sanitation and public works were complemented by the 1925 *Ley de Ejercicio de las Profesiones de Ingeniero, Arquitecto y Agrimensor*, which tried to improve the situation of Venezuelan professionals by tackling traditional irregularities (*Ley...*, 17-VIII-1925). The UCV having been reopened in 1922 after years of alleged reforms and political conflicts, the Escuela de Ciencias Físicas, Matemáticas y Naturales thereafter included Architecture as a weekly 3-hour course of Engineering. This curricular deficiency made professionals who had studied abroad more attractive to the major customers of architectural projects: the MOP and the Gómez bourgeoisie. By forcing the newcomers to submit examinations set by the CIV, the 1925 law tried to correct the situation (Caraballo, 1986: 75-77) - which was nevertheless to persist for some years, as we shall see. Also on the national level, the new 1925 *Constitución Nacional* stated that the provision of urban services was the first competence of municipalities, which should "Organizar sus servicios de policía, abastos, cementerios, ornamentación municipal, arquitectura civil, alumbrado público, acueductos, tranvías urbanos y demás de carácter municipal". In relation to hygiene, municipal competences were to be shared with the federal government (Art. 18, ord. 1, Brewer Carías, 1980: 117-18).

In the case of the administration of Caracas, in 1926 there was issued a new *Ordenanza sobre Policía Urbana y Rural*, which can be considered as an updated version of its 1910 predecessor. With tiny modifications in relation to civil architecture - such as an increase in the minimal capacity of bedrooms,

or the new rounded street corners which were meant to facilitate traffic - the main contribution of the 1926 ordinance was perhaps in the supervision of sewers and refuse disposal (arts. 102-103, 119-24, 274-77; 278-80, CMDF, 1926). The latter was of constant concern to the GDF administration, which had contracted private companies for daily refuse disposal since 1912; an *Ordenanza sobre Aseo Urbano y Domiciliario* was also issued in 1919 (GMDF, 12-XII-1912; CMDF, 26-VI-1919). By the mid-1920s, administrative responsibility for the service had passed to the Oficina de Sanidad Nacional, until it came to be shared between the GDF and the MRI's Dirección de Sanidad Nacional by the early 1930s (GMDF, 25-VI-1925; 11-I-1930; Archila, 1956, I: 167).

Highly inspired by its 1926 predecessor's chapter on "civil architecture", the brief *Ordenanza sobre Arquitectura Civil* of 1930 was, on the one hand, an attempt to regulate the urban sprawl of Caracas. Confirming that all public and private buildings should fulfil the requirements of sanitation, public ornamentation and traffic, the main innovation of the 1930 ordinance was in the procedures for the construction of new "urbanizaciones". Projects thereafter had to be evaluated by the GDF in terms of the provision of open spaces - 20 hectares of parks and plazas per each ha of construction - water supply and minimal street width of 12 m; some of these standards might be changed in the cases of working-class projects (arts. 1-2, 59-63, CMDF, 1930). On the other hand, the ordinance must be regarded as a late confirmation of the Gómez administration's concern for civil architecture and ornamentation. Though certainly expressed in a superficial and simplistic way, the Gomezalato's preoccupation for the "embellecimiento de Caracas" also inspired countless orders for painting the façades of private houses and public edifices on the eves of public holidays and feasts (GMDF, 29-10-

1910; 9-XI-1912; 9-III-1915; 15-IX-1925; 29-VIII-1931)

Although some of the new legal instruments of the Gomezalato have sometimes been regarded as timid and belated, and the 1930 *Ordenanza* allegedly formalized the profitable practice of urban sprawl (Di Pasquo, 1985: 37, 54), the Benemérito's overall contribution to the Caracas urban apparatus must be set in perspective. First of all - though resulting from a previous debate which has even been obliterated in recent approaches to the period (Martín, 1994: 120) - it must be recollected that the 1910 *Ordenanza* was an early breakthrough for Gómez's performance in the GDF. Secondly, the 1925 *Constitución* for the first time provided wide support to the municipal agenda of urban policing, which must be acknowledged as a far-reaching contribution beyond the dictator's own interests, and despite the administrative concurrence that was brought about in competences like transport (Brewer Carías, 1980: 118; 1985: 89). Thirdly, the conceptual apparatus of the Gomezalato assembled and distinguished at the same time previous and emerging components of Caraquenan pre-urbanism: although hygiene was no longer an exclusive competence of the municipalities, traffic and housing, civil architecture and ornamentation were kept together as the main ingredients of the forthcoming urbanism. All in all, despite his primitive suspicion of cities and his austere progressivism, the rustic condor ended up preserving and enhancing the main components of the urbanistic tradition coming from Guzmanian times.

One must therefore be cautious about the black legend which has depicted the relationship of Gómez with the capital. The dismal panorama of the sleeping Caracas has been extended by national and foreign chroniclers even until the 1930s (Mijares, 1960: 155; Uslar Pietri, 1969: 165; Arellano,

1972: 144, 152; Galey, 1973: 111; Violich, 1975: 264; Polanco, 1983: 122-23). But - as I hope to have demonstrated - the capital which had originally been rebuffed by the sulky dictator did undergo significant changes during the late Gomeزالato, when the oil-exporter administration seemed to forget its original resentment. Gómez's paroled Caracas potentially contained the first signs of the modern urbanism which was to bloom during the democratic era (Schael, 1977: 26; 1989: 27; Meneses, 1995: 137) - just as Victoria's redemption heralded the fresh start of a new urban culture after the end of the *belle époque*. But the plan for Caracas - which was to be the last catalyst for the emergence of this urbanism - was not undertaken by the dictator, though the capital long since provided the conditions which made it necessary. The urban plan had to wait for the arrival of democracy.



#### IV MONUMENTAL URBANISM

"Even in these anxious days when the European shadow touches South America with prophecy of test and trial, I expect a tranquil period for Venezuela"

Henry Justin Allen, *Venezuela. A Democracy* (1940)

#### GREETINGS FROM KANSAS

1. In spite of the Venezuelans' disbelief that the Benemérito would ever vanish off the face of the earth, the Brujo's last spell in history was to die on December 17, 1935 - on the anniversary of the Liberator's death, whose birthday Gómez had also shared. Following the brief aftermath of revolts which occurred at the beginning of the following year, the oil-exporter Venezuela was to take its first democratic steps as a twentieth-century republic during the presidency of General Eleazar López Contreras (1936-41). The new administration soon tried to invigorate the *modus vivendi* established since 1933 with Franklin D. Roosevelt's government, whose policy of "Good Neighbour" to Latin America favoured oil-producer Venezuela with a "trato justo y de buena vecindad" (López Contreras, 1954: 39-42). New commercial agreements meant that American investments in petroleum and infrastructure amounted to 61.77% of the total foreign capital by 1938 - a definite defeat of British investments in the oil sector (Segnini, 1990: 19-20). The Colossus's satisfaction with post-Gómez breakthroughs can be illustrated through the enthusiastic descriptions of American visitors to the booming country: Erna Fergusson's comprehensive guide *Venezuela* (1939) was soon followed by Henry Justin Allen's *Venezuela. A Democracy* (1940), a detailed report of the Kansas Senator's visit during the third year of López's administration. Both descriptions - and especially the latter - have

the tone of greetings cards sent by grateful guests who approved of everything they were shown.

When meeting the leader of the Venezuelan transition, the Americans certainly received a pleasant impression: "López Contreras is a cultivated man, a gentleman, one who knows foreign lands as student and traveller, who is familiar with up-to-date thought. He looks more like a scholar than a general", noticed Fergusson; whereas the Republican Senator confirmed that the new President "strikes you at once as an educated, thoughtful man" (Fergusson, 1939: 61; Allen, 1940: 30). A native Andean who had arrived in Caracas with Castro and Gómez, López was a younger and more learned military man, so skilful in warfare that Castro had even intended to send him to West Point. His knowledge of foreign lands was mainly acquired during the 3 months he had been travelling across the United States and Europe between 1920 and 1921, when, as Gómez's envoy, he had to inspect the purchase of war ammunition, before being appointed as Minister of Guerra y Marina. The young officer had had the opportunity to visit New York and Washington, London and Paris - a journey of great influence in the future President's education (Sanín, 1982: 38; Polanco, 1985: 82; Chiossone, 1989: 21). When he repeated the European tour in the early 1950s - on board a transatlantic vessel called *United States* - the ex-president would recollect the impressions of that first journey, at least in relation to the supremacy of Parisian charms: "Ni Nueva York, con sus colosales edificios, ni Londres por su extensión, ni Washington con la belleza de sus modernas urbanizaciones, pueden competir con los encantos de París" (López Contreras, 1954: 143-44, 173).

Praising Gómez's appointed successor for waiting to be legally elected by

the Venezuelan congress in April 1936 - "though he was Commander in Chief of the army and might have taken the post without formality" - the Americans also highlighted the democratic breakthroughs by the new President. Belittling the anti-communist controls inherited from Gómez's alignment with North American capitalism, Fergusson highlighted the liberalization of the former dictatorship: "There was freedom of speech; anybody could say anything! And in spite of those few quite suppressions, the magazine-stands were ablaze with radical publications. Translations of Marx and Engels appeared, and many Latin American books and periodicals of liberal or outright radical opinion..." (1939: 64). The Republican Senator also seemed to be satisfied with the new standards reached by the public media: supplied by the Associated Press and the United Press International, the Caracas newspapers then gave "a broad coverage of world news"; though somewhat "leftish", they had not become "a Communistic press" - despite the actual presence of communists "who had come over from Mexico" (Allen, 1940: 40-41). But - as both the visitors knew - the ideological openness was not dangerous, since López Contreras's prosperous Venezuela was far from being 1910 Mexico or 1917 Russia; besides, the American tutelage protected its oil-supplier from falling into the whirl of communism (Díaz Sánchez, 1937: 88; Toro, 1993: 255-56).

2. The new President soon started to make use of "the radio voice as a political instrument", a novelty in a Venezuela which had never heard any speech delivered by Gómez; read with his voice "pleasant though not thrilling", his speeches carried "a conviction of sincerity" (Fergusson, 1939: 62; Allen, 1940: 24). Since the broadcast of the first governmental programme on February 21, 1936, López intended a liberal, technical and

socially-conscious reinterpretation of the Gomeزالato's raw progressivism. Writers already established while in exile, such as Gallegos and Pocaterra, were summoned to the pluralistic cabinet, jointly with emerging intellectuals like Mariano Picón Salas and Arturo Uslar Pietri. In contrast with Gómez's dislike of technicians, the up-to-date President cared about the incorporation of specialists in different fields, such as the Catalan economist José Antonio Vandellós, contracted by the government to set up the statistical departments of the different ministries, as well as the first statistics curriculum at the UCV (López Contreras, 1936: 15). Following the technocratic renewal of the first two years, in 1938 there was launched the *Plan Trienal*, which framed the administrative policies and goals for the rest of the period; there López formulated his own vision of Venezuela's major necessities in terms of "sanear, educar, poblar" - an enlightened enhancement of Gómez's "sanear es poblar" (1955: 17). In order to reach that progressive triad, especial attention had to be given, among other targets,

"a la construcción de vías públicas que abaraten los transportes; ... a la higienización del hombre y del medio en que vive; al abastecimiento de agua potable y de cloacas; a la construcción de hospitales y de centros de asistencia social; ... a la edificación de casas para obreros y para la clase media..." (López Contreras, 1938: 7).

In addition to the new statistical apparatus, López's hygienical programme relied upon a platform better supported than the Gomeزالato's. In administrative terms, there were created the Instituto Nacional de Higiene and the MSAS's División de Ingeniería Sanitaria (López Contreras, 1936: 19). As Allen was able to confirm in his visits to the new centres, the new sanitary infrastructure of Caracas and other cities included "impressive hospitals", whose sophisticated equipment was American or German, from

the elevators to the operating rooms and the radiological, electric and X-ray mechanisms. Furthermore, some of the specialized staff in new hospitals and clinics had been trained in North American universities - following a sanitary policy sponsored by both the Venezuelan government and the Rockefeller Foundation (López Contreras, 1966: 21, 115). This is why - when chatting with the young doctors of new Caraqueñan hospitals - the Senator was delighted at the fact that the "native Venezuelans of Indian parentage" had the best academic credentials from Johns Hopkins or Tulane University (Allen, 1940: vii, 134-36)

By the years of Allen's visit, the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored 7 additional fellowships for Venezuelans in the hygiene or public health schools at Johns Hopkins, Harvard and Toronto. The Senator hastened to make clear, though, that the gifts of the Foundation to Venezuela had "no connection with the extensive activities of the Standard Oil Company" (1940: 151-52). The sanitary assistance turned out to be more conspicuous on the eve of World War II, when the Americans increased their natural interest in the Latin countries' health - "an interest as vital and compelling as a man's interest in his own leg", as Charles Morrow Wilson put it in *Ambassadors in White*. In the case of Venezuela, the Rockefeller Foundation and the oil companies were thus the white ambassadors responsible for the crusade aimed at wiping out the "distinctly European heritage" of Latin America as "a sick man's society" (Wilson, 1942: 20).

3. López's progressive triad also relied upon a more technical and efficient approach to the execution of public works. The shift was made explicit by the MOP's new administration since the early "Bases del Plan General de Obras

*Públicas para el Año Económico 1936-37*", published in the RTMOP by the new Minister Tomás Pacanins - an engineer from George Washington University and former representative of General Electric to Venezuela. Adding educational buildings to the traditional priorities of aqueducts, sewers and routes of communication, the Plan stressed that the MOP intended "una renovación total de sus métodos de trabajo" in relation to the "antiguo método administrativo", with special reference to the schedule of projects and contracts (MOP, 1936: 142). In relation to the pending problem of water services for the province, the renovation speeded up the provision of aqueducts and sewers for countless Venezuelan cities and towns; the Caracas system was also enhanced, according to a 1936 contract between the MOP and the CMDF (López, 1936: 16; 1-VI-1936, *Digesto*, 1939: 327-29). The progress made by the time of Allen's visit astonished the Senator: the sewage network of the capital had been enlarged "at a speed which amounts a mile a month, at a cost nearly 40 per cent under the unit estimate - a saving accomplished by the intense application with which the work has been pushed" (1940: 154-55).

The innovational programme of public works also sought the consolidation of a "sistema nacional de ciudades", by strengthening commercial and communicational links across the country. In this respect, two major goals of the programme were the "Planificación y ejecución metódica de un sistema nacional de carreteras, en vista de enlazar los centros de producción con los de consumo, y ambos con los puertos y los centros fronterizos"; as well as the "Reglamentación nacional del tráfico automotor, de manera que pueda realizarse con la mayor economía, seguridad y eficiencia" (López Contreras, 1966: 21-22). The use of all this technical vocabulary was encouraged by the MOP's late Minister Enrique Aguerrevere, appointed from

July 1938 until the end of the *Plan Trienal*. An engineer from the UCV, Aguerrevere had also been a post-graduate student at Stanford University, and later on was professionally trained in the United States and Europe by the Cities Service Company (Polanco, 1985: 203).

The changes hailed by the American visitors were but examples of the social and administrative renovation taking place in López's Venezuela at all levels - from the blossoming of political parties to the organization of trade unions, from the adoption of planning methods to the specialization of public staff. The new generations of Venezuelan technocrats - some of them returning from exile, some others from their academic experiences abroad - were to make possible the mental urbanization which could not occur during the Gomezialato. They envisaged a Venezuela with a stronger urban basis, whose main references had to come from their contact with North America's oil-business or academic centres, or from their experiences in New York or Paris (Lombardi, 1982: 214-21, 245; Méndez, 1993: 37). Nevertheless - unlike the President himself - they had probably not yet decided which metropolis had gained their intimate preference.

"París de ayer, de hoy, de siempre; único por su pasado, elegante, alegre y acogedor."

Eleazar López Contreras, *Temas de Historia Bolivariana* (1954)

#### PARIS OR NEW YORK? RENEWAL OR EXPANSION?

4. In order to get rid of Gómez's spectre, one of the first steps taken by the new administration was to move the presidential residence back to Caracas by the very end of 1935. López Contreras was to find a capital which -

despite its prolonged rebuff - had long since shown the signs of the petroleum boom: with a population of 203,342 and an extension of 542 urban ha by 1936, Caracas possessed the highest density of Venezuela - 146.84 inhabitants per square km - while the demographic increase had been 45% since 1926. Rural-urban migration had become an important factor of growth: 87,902 residents were born from immigrants to the capital, which boasted 8 lines of taxis and cars, 2 tram enterprises, buses, trucks and - according to the recognition by the census - an "activísima" urban life (MF, *Sexto Censo*, 1939, I: 12, 19-21, 27). In contrast with the Gómez era, changes in the bustling centre were particularly noticeable for the young protagonist of *Allá en Caracas*, who returned to the democratic country after 10 years studying in Paris:

"Las casas se me hacían demasiado bajas y las calles demasiado estrechas para dos automóviles a la vez. En diez años de ausencia encontraba a Caracas transformada. Es verdad que el aspecto general de la ciudad era el mismo. Casas pintadas de distintos colores, cables telefónicos cargados de extraña vegetación, vendedores de billetes de loterías en las esquinas, pero de dónde venía el gentío que llenaba las aceras, los tranvías, los autobuses? Costaba abrirse paso entre la multitud apresurada y dicharachera. Poca cosa quedaba de la aldea tranquila y sosegada, que me vió nacer. Antes era fácil reconocer a los escasos transeúntes que se llevaban la mano al sombrero al pasar una señora camino de la iglesia. Los vehículos se movilizaban con soltura. Unos cuantos ricos solamente poseían automóviles. Ahora el tráfico resultaba un tormento, las bocinas metían un ruido horrible, casi insoportable..." (Vallenilla Lanz, hijo, 1954: 292).

Beyond the centre, the returner was astonished at the way the new *urbanizaciones* had replaced the coffee plantations of his childhood. From La Florida to Chacao, eastern suburbs evinced a growing speculation in real



estate, urbanized with a frenzy which he never perceived in the early Gómez era (Vallenilla Lanz hijo, 1954: 292-93). Although the Colombian visitor Luis Enrique Osorio was to find that this expansion was not comparable “con el impulso fabril de Chicago o Nueva York, ni con la fiebre comercial de otras grandes urbes”, the social changes involved were more evident than in Bogotá (1943: 60). When travelling through South America in those years, Roche was also able to confirm that the bourgeois suburbs of Caracas were not only more luxurious than Bogotá’s, but even better than some of Buenos Aires - though, in general, Caracas still looked like a sort of village when compared to the southern metropolis (Roche, 1945: 22, 90).

The economic boom of López’s Caracas was also noticeable to the Americans: the city was so much visited by businessmen that the *Hotel Majestic* had to charge Allen for the days he delayed in embarking from New York; the Senator probably ignored the fact that the democratic capital boasted other top hotels, such as the *Madrid*, the *Palace*, the *Royal* and the *Domke* (Allen, 1940: vii). Though criticizing some aspects of the “noisy, busy, dirty and indifferent city of Caracas”, Fergusson was astonished at the variety and abundance of imported merchandise: “stores are crammed with luxuries from all the world - British boots and biscuits, French wines and perfumes, Italian oil and *pasta*, German cameras and glasses, and from the States every kind of electrical appliance”. The contrast with other Latin capitals was even more evident in the central market of Caracas: “Instead of the pinchbeck dabs of the poor folk’s markets of Mexico and Guatemala, it offers piles of melons and oranges, pyramids of pineapples and sides of beef and mutton” (Fergusson, 1939: 68-69).

Fuelled by the oil bonanza, the exotic consumerism of López Contreras’s

Caracas coincided with the fashionable dilettantism of the bourgeois and politicians returning from abroad. Some of the Gómez diplomats rooted in Europe had certainly lamented when they had had to return to the democratic capital to work in private offices or banks - as happened to some characters of *Allá en Caracas*. But its protagonist found that - apart from those who kept on yearning for their past years in the French capital - some of his early friends who had stayed in Caracas disliked Paris and preferred the "ciudades modernas" they frequented for study, business or tourism, like New York, Cincinnati and Rio. The prosperous young gentlemen and their charming wives now usually gathered at the American bar of the posh Country Club - the same visited by Lady Mills some years before. Like most of the cosmopolitan dwellers in new suburbs, the group of friends was "really more at home in Paris, London or New York than in Caracas" - as Fergusson was able to confirm (1939: 71; Vallenilla Lanz hijo, 1954: 279-80, 299, 308-309).

Meanwhile, mass spectacles consolidated the Americans' cultural takeover of the democratic capital. In the new two-storey cinemas, when Hitler, Mussolini or Franco appeared in the newsreels prior to the films, some members of the public from the expensive localities applauded, while people at the galleries whistled (Díaz Sánchez, 1937: 98). But once the film had started, all the audience was equally absorbed in reading the Spanish captions of the English dialogues. The worship of Yankee films even embarrassed Fergusson, who felt awkward at the Venezuelans' better knowledge of the Americans: "Hollywood has left us not a shred to cover our shame", apologized the visitor (1939: 98). In the open venues, increasing multitudes were attracted by the machinery fabricated around the most popular sports, such as baseball and boxing - the latter even regulated by a

new *Reglamento de Boxeo* passed by the GDF in 1936 (GMDF, 24-IX-1936). As happened to one of the protagonists of Guillermo Meneses's *Campeones* (1939), the new baseball teams - such as the "Nueva York" and the "Yankees" - offered the possibility to young and humble immigrants of rocketing into the sudden wealth and ephemeral stardom typical of a mass society (Meneses, 1990: 48-50, 106, 115-16).

At the level of the elite's entertainments, the Americans' new patronage was welcomed in the galas at the Municipal, when the performances by the Opera Association of New York became the highlight of the opera seasons of Caracas (Salas, 1974: 214). However, at a fancy-dress ball offered to honour President López Contreras and his wife in a splendid villa at La Florida, Caraquenian belles still opted for the glamour of the French repertoire, their fantasies running from Madame Récamier through the Marchioness of Versailles to the Empress Eugenia de Montijo, the wife of Napoleon III (Vallenilla Lanz hijo, 1954: 318). Perhaps the belles of the ball just wanted to please President López's weakness for Parisian charms.

5. Given its potentially revolutionary effects, Gómez had always postponed any discussion of the urban changes to Caracas; but immediately after his death, the debate was to burgeon out in the national press, while related articles appeared in specialized journals. The daydreams and fantasies repressed for so many years started to be released haphazardly in the utopian proposals of Ramiro Nava - a visionary lawyer and architect who came to be known as the Venezuelan Jules Verne. As a part of his ambitious plan "Bloque de Oro" - published in *El Universal* since January 1936 - the former representative of Maracaibo to the 1911 Congreso de

Municipalidades had already proposed the creation of both a Banco Nacional Hipotecario Urbano and a Banco Social; these housing agencies were not only intended to be economic instruments to solve the housing problems of Caracas, but also “uno de los mejores métodos de culturización basado en el hogar, tan reverenciado de los ingleses” (1971: 663-68). But the bulk of Nava's extravaganza was to be displayed in the proposals for López's restored capital, comprised in his “Plan Ramironava”, which intended to be a step forward in relation to the allegedly timid and abstract programme of the government (1971: 690-94).

In order to link the city with the Caribbean littoral, the fellow member of societies of engineers of London and Chicago envisaged the construction of the “Bahía de Caracas”, by digging a 10 km-long and 12 m-deep channel, “parecido al canal de Panamá”, traversed by a “subwai” (*sic*) which would communicate the Plaza Bolívar with the sea in 5 or 6 minutes. “De suerte que podríamos ir a bañarnos en el Mar en cinco minutos y volver al centro de Caracas al cuarto de hora, sin ninguna molestia: un paseo de tranvía!” - Nava enthused Caraquenians, probably thinking of the harassed businessmen who might fancy a beach break at lunch time. Provided with casinos, cabarets, “dancings”, “Coney-Islands” and “ferriboats” (*sic*), among other touristic facilities, the Caracas bay would easily re-create “el encanto de un ancho Canal Veneciano” (1971: 754-56). The new routes of communication with La Guaira were to be bordered by country clubs devoted to different nationalities - presided over by the American club - as well as caravan sites, so that Caraquenians could camp during the “week end” (*sic*) in mobile houses like those in fashion in the United States (1971: 775-88). All these works were to be supervised by Venezuelan professionals helped by American engineers, while the execution would likewise rely upon

Venezuelan and white American workers, "de buenos principios" and "ajenos a las doctrinas socialistas" (1971: 759). The construction of canals, "subwais" (*sic*), skyscrapers and bridges had made possible progress in countries like the United States, just as parks and avenues had done in cities like Buenos Aires. Therefore, if the Bahía de Caracas was carried out, Venezuela "se colocaría más alto que la Argentina", and could also launch an international exhibition - Nava later explained to the astonished public listening to the radio programme "La Voz de la Philco" (1971: 770-72).

At the same time, the transformations of the "Venecia de Caracas" included internal changes which were meant to convert the Venezuelan capital into one of the most beautiful cities of the world - even more than Rio, Buenos Aires or Naples. The expansion and connection of the Guaire river with other watercourses and ponds would make Caracas comparable with the Venice of the Adriatic; the re-creation of European ambiance - "sin los inconvenientes de aquellos lugares de Europa" - was to be completed with the importation of gondolas and romantic singers. With its new bay and its Venice-like canals, Caracas would surely become the first port of South America; additionally, rescuing the Guaire was important because all great capitals boasted great rivers, as was the case of the Hudson in New York, the Seine in Paris, the Thames in London and the Plata in Buenos Aires (Nava, 1971: 696, 789-98).

Apart from the Venetian extravaganza, further changes were required in order to turn Caracas into the most beautiful city of the world. From western Catia to eastern Petare, a Gran Avenida Bolívar was to go along the centre of the valley; with a width of 20 m and a length of 20 km, bordered by 2-storey residential houses and 6-storey commercial buildings, the new

"Quinta Avenida" would at the same time be "como un Central Parque, con monumentos, jardines, plazoletas, cines, etc" (Nava, 1971: 709-12). The visionary's renewal of the centre also featured location for 1 million people in 6-storey buildings, underground networks of services, monuments consecrated to the Independence heroes, a capitol equivalent to that of Washington, traffic islands decorated with greenery, special buildings in which to keep cars while users were in the City... Awards were also contemplated for the most beautiful *quintas*, because Caracas was to be "la CIUDAD-JARDIN por excelencia", the most beautiful garden of the Americas, superior to Buenos Aires or Rio - claimed as the developer of the "Barriojardín Ramironava" in La Pastora (Nava, 1971: 803-810).

6. Less ambitious but more realistic were other proposals for the refurbishment of the city centre and its articulation with eastern suburbs. A few days after the presentation of López's governmental programme, there appeared in *El Universal* an anonymous "Proyecto de Ensanche para Caracas. Cómo resolver el primer problema de congestión de tráfico", which for the first time publicly complained about the fact that Gómez's government had not invested in Caracas even half of the millions wasted in Maracay. The centre of the reestablished capital faced functional, sanitary and traffic shortcomings; the latter could no longer be solved with further organization of the transit, but only with the necessary transformation of one of the colonial streets into a big avenue. As well as being a traffic solution, this enlargement also seemed to be a matter of urban status: "Caracas es y seguirá siendo un pueblo grande mientras no se proceda a un ensanche de por lo menos una de sus calles, ensanche que permitirá entonces llamarla ciudad...". In addition to the proposal for a 26 m-wide avenue - starting from

the southern centre and running eastwards of Caracas - the author concluded with an appeal to the developers' technical expertise in order to tackle the necessary changes ("Proyecto...", 1936: 5).

A week later, Luis Roche hastened to publish his response in the same newspaper. In "Embellecimiento de Caracas", the well-known developer recognized not only the traffic, sanitary and functional shortcomings of the capital, but also the ornamental deterioration due to the invasion of cars and the rampant installation of new infrastructure. For instance - despite the passage of a 1924 ordinance regulating the location of posts on pavements (GMDF, 1-X-1924) - the entanglement of electric wires and stakes gave the Caracas skyline the image of a "selva virgen". Apart from some recommendations for the sanitary and financial development of the capital, the highlight of Roche's proposal was in relation to the design of new roads - which seemed to imitate the examples of both New York and Paris. On the one hand, there was proposed the consolidation of the so-called Carretera del Este, the semi-rural thoroughfare linking the bourgeois suburbs eastwards of the centre; this spinal column of tomorrow's capital would have to be fitted for its role as "el Broadway caraqueño". On the other hand, the historic centre was to be traversed east-west by the new Avenida Simón Bolívar, whose 36-m section was explicitly inspired by the example of the Champs Elysées. After all, the remembrance of his Parisian years seemed to prevail in Roche's scenario, at least in terms of the patriotic symbolism of the new civic axis: with the incorporation of a monument devoted to Bolívar in western El Calvario, "los transeúntes podrían contemplar muchas tardes, como sucede con el Arco de Triunfo de la Estrella en París, el monumento en la apoteosis fulgurante de las puestas de sol" (Roche, 1936: 3).

In a series of didactic articles published in *El Universal* from 1938, the crusade for renewing the centre of Caracas was taken up by the Spanish Rafael Bergamín. With a quotation from the French urbanist Henri Prost - "el Urbanismo es la organización del terreno en las ciudades" - the newcomer explained his particular vision of the problems of the crowded centre: in addition to the structural restrictions due to its colonial grid and its defective drainage, the functional modification of a centre where "indefectiblemente se superponen y se confunden el centro comercial, el administrativo, el representativo, etc" was urged by the author (1959: 19). In relation to this, Bergamín proposed a densification of the lots of central blocks, with 5-storey buildings which would allow for the widening of central streets, whilst rescuing inner spaces for greenery - one of the major wants of Caracas. The broadened grid would be presided over by a 35-40 m-wide avenue running from west to east, bordered by arches which would shelter commercial and pedestrian activities, according to the Spanish tradition and the example of the Parisian Rue de Rivoli and of "tantas otras bellas ciudades europeas" (Bergamín, 1959: 14, 22-23).

Despite their relative lack of theoretical support, all these proposals had the merit of coming to terms with the historic challenges of post-Gómez Caracas. They publicly proclaimed the exhaustion of its colonial centre - whose untouched grid had suffered nearly four centuries of social and economic changes (Morales Tucker and others, 1990: 91-106). They also transformed the pending questions of urban sprawl and traffic into the more general issues of the urban renewal of the centre and its articulation to the eastern suburbs, while urging for planning instruments in this respect (Caraballo, 1991: 50). Especially the proposals of Roche and Bergamín had the merit of combining functional needs with aesthetic ameliorations in terms of



monumentality, ornamentation and greenery - an equilibrium of which it was good to remind the greedy developers of the booming capital. But, above all, there was a point which all these proposals agreed about: the crisis of the growth and traffic of Caracas could not be solved with a partial treatment of its centre alone, but with a general plan for the city.

7. In addition to the problems of central areas, the debate about the expansion of modern cities was also emerging in the more specialized literature arriving in the professional milieu of Caracas. In a digest of the article "Urbanismo. La división del terreno en las ciudades" - originally published in the Santiago de Chile magazine *Zig-Zag*, and republished by the renovated RTMOP in February 1938 - the unnamed author opposed two types of cities: on the one hand, those "construídas en formas de ciudades jardines, que tienen por resultado la dispersión de sus habitantes y una considerable expansión del área que ocupan"; on the other hand, "las ciudades cuyos habitantes viven aglomerados en altos edificios, determinantes de una modalidad social solitaria, y cuya principal consecuencia es la estructura reducida de su planta" ("Urbanismo...", 1938: 780). Having confessed his metropolitan faith by stating that small cities were but mere attempts at great ones, the author also accepted the mechanistic fate of the twentieth-century, by distinguishing dwelling and work as two major urban functions to be regulated by the communication system. On this conceptual basis, the digest reported the *raison d'être* of the Brussels Congress as the confrontation between garden cities and urban concentration; between these tendencies, the latter should undoubtedly be favoured, for the sake of its economic and social benefits:

"La ciudad-jardín nos lleva al individualismo. En realidad al individualismo

que significa esclavitud; a decir verdad, a un aislamiento estéril del individuo: entraña la destrucción del espíritu social, de las fuerzas colectivas; conduce a la pérdida de la voluntad colectiva; hablando en términos materiales, se opone al desarrollo de las conquistas científicas, y, en consecuencia, al confort, a la economía del tiempo, y a la libertad.

*"Por una entre mil o entre cien personas, que sale beneficiada con la ciudad-jardín, el resto resulta directamente perjudicado.*

*"La concentración urbana, al contrario, permite la aplicación integral de los beneficios modernos."* ("Urbanismo...", 1938: 781; italics in the original).

Given so many disadvantages of the garden cities, there obviously remained one valid option for urban growth: through the adoption of the means provided by modern technology - epitomized by the use of the lift - more efficient high-density designs should be encouraged in both traditional and new urban areas, from the layout of streets to the design of buildings (1938: 782-83).

Criticizing the endless extension of great European cities like Paris, Berlin or London, and especially the monstrous cases of New York and Buenos Aires, a less progressive position in relation to metropolitan growth was maintained by Bergamín, who encouraged - "en buen Urbanismo" - the logical and functional development of cities only to moderate dimensions. In terms of population, the Spaniard reckoned that cities between 200,000 and 400,000 were "casi perfectas, cómodas y, desde luego, saludables" (Bergamín, 1959: 26-27). Though he believed that Caracas was never to surpass that limit, current problems should be solved in order to equip the city for that possible scenario. In terms of extension, limits should be preserved by combining different densities of housing developments: quoting Walter Gropius's ideas about the spatial impossibility of a city where all the inhabitants lived in houses with gardens, Bergamín opted for the combination of 10-12 storey

"casas altas" with low houses where Nature might be enjoyed on a daily basis, and not only on Sundays (1959: 80)

This mixed formula was actually adopted in 1937 in Bella Vista, a BO-funded development which combined 6 two-storey blocks and 159 one-family houses; each block contained 22 flats plus services. Because of its being a bucolic settlement 5 km southwest of central Caracas, it has been assumed that Bella Vista was inspired by Howard's ideas, as also happened with Guinand's *Lídice* and *Propatria* - a 300-unit project which pioneered high-density residence in western Caracas (García, 1985: 76-77; Martín, 1995: 87-90). No matter how debatable this assumption is - as well as how simplistic the portrayal of the social cost of garden cities was - it seems that these "ciudades jardín" were presented to Caraqueñians as the only alternative to the high-rise densification of great metropolises. Also in terms of the options for urban expansion, the sprawling Caracas thus faced another dilemma.

8. The oppositions were also evident in terms of the architectural trends reported in López's Caracas, where the late expressions of modernism were retarded by the nostalgia for the grand manners of Beaux Arts. This was the case with the cautious conclusions about modern architecture reported from Buenos Aires by professor Alejandro Christophersen, whose article "La Arquitectura del Siglo XIX" was published in the RTMOP in August 1936. By revising the philosophical, literary, artistic and musical components of nineteenth-century Europe, the architect and painter obviously intended to highlight the importance of the humanities for architecture, at least according to the education he had received in the Beaux-Arts Academy of Paris. Brief

accounts of the major architectural trends of nineteenth-century Europe - from Violet le Duc's neo-Gothicism to Garnier's Beaux Arts, from the Art Nouveau's "pastiches" to Otto Wagner's modern classicism - were set in perspective with their artistic counterparts. Professor Christophersen neither opposed the skyscrapers as necessary solutions to the problem of land values in cities like New York and Chicago, nor rejected the technological innovations which had been presented in the 1900 Paris Exhibition. However, when envisaging the scenario for the rest of the new century, the Beaux-Arts disciple disclosed his inner doubts about the artistic whereabouts of contemporary architecture, wondering which would be

"el derrotero que emprenderá la arquitectura para construir un nuevo esplendor que haga conservar a este arte el lugar que le corresponde... Una densa nube oscurece el magnífico panorama del arte del pasado, dando paso libre a la arquitectura que se anuncia impuesta por las necesidades contemporáneas" (Christophersen, 1936: 197).

A piecemeal report on this architecture of contemporary necessities had arrived in Caracas by the late Gómez era. Le Corbusier's proposals for the 1925 Paris Exhibition were commented on by critic Seijas Cook; later Corbusian projects were presented to the CIV by architect Cipriano Domínguez in 1936, when he returned from Paris (Gasparini and Posani, 1969: 342). In those years, Bergamín appraised Le Corbusier's new "máquina para vivir", recognizing that it was an economic solution which liberated both domestic and urban space; it was not necessary to think of the absurd New York as the only place where it might be implemented: the traditional salons of Caraquenian houses might be replaced by the "living" or "sitting-room", while the "pantry" would be considered as an important area of the new flats. Though only as a part of his campaign for more greenery in a Caracas plagued with rampant urbanization, Bergamín also referred to Le

Corbusier's house built around a tree (1959: 20-21, 38-41). In addition to these reports about foreign modernity, questions about the national panorama were raised by Seijas Cook in 1936: searching for the vernacular roots of Venezuelan architecture, the critic looked back to the works of the Guzmanian and post-Guzmanian masters, reminding his colleagues at the same time of the traditional feebleness of this discipline as a specialized field in Venezuela (Seijas Cook, 1936: 322-27).

As some of their *quintas* in the Caracas suburbs had evinced since the late Gómez era, young Venezuelan architects were eager to import recent trends of international architecture - from the European Art Deco and Corbusian modernism to the technological pragmatism of North American architecture, epitomized by the very much talked-about Rockefeller Center (Caraballo, 1991: 66-68). As a matter of fact, since the days when the *Hotel Majestic* had broken the smooth skyline of Gómez's Caracas, the so-called "edificios" were welcomed by Caraqueños, whose architectural taste was already "bajo el imperio fascinante de los rascacielos norteamericanos" (Orihuela, 1968: 59). However, in some other *quintas* of the suburbs, architects were still asked by their clients to pay tribute to the eclecticism inherited from Beaux Arts and the *belle époque* - a tribute which delayed the true arrival of architectural modernity until the 1940s (Gasparini and Posani, 1969: 367).

9. The urban dilemmas of the López capital were catalysed by the traffic problem, which had worsened since the Gomezalato's fruitless measures. The harassed drivers of Caracas had been given many hopes by the time of Fergusson's arrival, when the novelty of traffic lights was pointed out to the visitor by taxi chauffeurs, who also explained naively to all passengers how

one had to "wait until the red light turns green"; while waiting, Fergusson noticed that the horns screamed "with joy, perhaps, at the new toy" (1939: 66). But traffic lights were not enough to solve all the problems which caused the jams in central Caracas, as Allen was able to realize when moving through the streets around the *Majestic* hotel:

"The automobile traffic in Caracas in most hours of day is fully as congested as in New York during rush periods. The handling of traffic is competent, considering the narrowness of the streets. It is a traffic in endless motion. There are few places for street parking; cars circle the blocks while waiting for the passengers who are visiting the shops." (Allen, 1940: 268-69).

Although Allen was probably mistaken when estimating that there were 20,000 cars in López's capital, figures released later were not so far from the American's calculations. In a report called "El Tráfico Automovilístico en la Ciudad de Caracas y su Influencia en el Futuro de la Capital" (1940) - based upon surveys probably carried out by the Asociación Venezolana de Ingenieros (AVI) - the real situation of the post-dictatorial capital was explained with a profusion of data. From the 4,500 cars of the late Gómez years, the prosperity of democratic Caracas fuelled a steady growth in both the absolute number of cars and the relative annual increase: 6,013 units in 1936, 30% more than in 1935; 8,439, i.e. 40% in 1937; 10,477, i.e. 19.4% in 1938; 12,381, i.e. 15% in 1939. At the same time, the oil income apparently raised the index of Caraqueños' vehicular tenure: 50 inhabitants per car in 1930 and 1935, 47 in 1936, 34 in 1937, 28 in 1938 and 24 in 1939. When comparing these indexes with those of New York since the late 1910s - 48 inhabitants per car in 1916, 34 in 1918, 25 in 1920 - the report noticed how the evolution of the northern metropolis anticipated that of Caracas with a difference of 20 years; this gap was expected to diminish in the future, "pués la opinión de los expertos americanos es que en América se bajará

difficilmente de 7,5 habitantes por carro para la población urbana y de 3,8 para la población suburbana..." ("El Tráfico...", 1940: 6).

As in the approach of Roche and his anonymous interlocutor, the report considered that the Inspectoría General de Vehículos was doing its best to manage the circulatory difficulties of Caracas, but the actual problem could only be solved by widening the streets (1940: 7-8). Otherwise, the Venezuelan capital might become a huge parking place - an impression received by Roche when returning from his travels across other capitals of South America which had obviously managed the problem better (1945: 169). In view of the seriousness of the situation, and searching for structural changes, the report finally evaluated the alternative solutions to the parking problem in the commercial district of Caracas:

"Distintas soluciones se presentan para resolver estos problemas. Algunas hay que descartarlas, por ejemplo, la extensión del centro comercial de la ciudad ... El ideal sería un centro estrecho muy denso donde las actividades de un hombre de negocio no requieran de vehículo. Por ejemplo, el centro Wall Street de New York, donde trabajan más de 500.000 empleados y no circulan carros, puesto que cada empleado llega por la mañana y no utiliza más el vehículo durante el día.

"Extender un centro comercial es obligar a los hombres de negocio a ir de un lado a otro de la ciudad en automóvil, 4 o 5 veces por día. En París existe este defecto que acarrea diariamente una pérdida de 2 horas." ("El Tráfico...", 1940: 11-12).

Once again, when confronted with their parking problem, Caraquenians were referred to the old metropolitan dilemma between Paris and New York - though this time with an open recommendation of the latter. In spite of staying 20 years behind the northern metropolis, the central district of Caracas could already be dreamt of as a small Wall Street, whose hectic

businessmen had no time to waste - as Parisians apparently did have. The metropolitan dilemma coming from the time of Marfa Eugenia and Victoria was multiplied by the alternative models of urban growth: between a Paris ambiguously associated with the extension of central activities and a New York which epitomized the economies of the urban concentration, the traffic experts and the reporters of modernism seemed to attribute to the northern metropolis the virtues of densification. But the meanings of these two metropolises were apparently different in Roche's proposal, where Parisian monumentality still inspired the urban renewal of the centre, whereas Broadway-like avenues led the extension of the urban layout, as also occurred in Nava's Americanized fantasies. If New York, however, was the laboratory for the urban experts and visionaries, Paris was still the centre of *belle-époque* charms for the Venezuelan President and many bourgeois of Caraqueñan villas. Though not yet solving the dilemmas about the two metropolises, the aforementioned proposals, articles and reports had the merit of awakening the Caraqueñans' wishes and needs for the democratic capital, while assembling the pending chapters of the Gómez agenda into a major urban question: renewal or expansion?

"The new plans for Caracas are so sweeping that it is not strange the commission withholds them until they are ready to go ahead. They now approach that point."

Henry Justin Allen, *Venezuela. A Democracy* (1940)

## ORNAMENT WITH NECESSITY

10. Meanwhile, some of the dilemmas had already been solved by the new Governor of Caracas, General Elbano Mibelli, appointed by the President in



February 1936 - at the difficult moment when riotous mobs of Caraquenians were plundering the belongings of the Gomezalato elite. Another Andean who had joined the Revolución Restauradora in 1899, Mibelli had been prefect of one of the administrative sections of Caracas and an important functionary during the Gómez administration; nevertheless, after his participation in an abortive rebellion in 1928, he was jailed till the end of the regime. In view of this final episode against the tyranny, the Caraquenian rebels resented Mibelli's annihilation of the 1936 protests, as well as his resolute battle against Venezuela's emerging communism - which even included an anti-communist secret service operating from the GDF. This is why the Governor has remained a polemical figure for a long time: though even López Contreras himself would later recognize that "Elbano era más gomecista que yo" (Sanín, 1982: 247), for the then Secretary of the Presidency, Mibelli only was "el verdadero Gobernador, inflexible en asuntos de disciplina e implacable mantenedor del principio de autoridad" (Chiossone, 1989: 63, 69).

According to his authoritarian style and his political aims, from the beginning Mibelli improved both the equipment and the organization of the Caraquenian police service. The "able head" of the GDF also boosted the hygienical targets of the López administration: when Allen arrived in Caracas, not only were the streets "ripped wide open for the installation of new water works", but also 7 new hospitals and sanatoriums had been built in the DF during the last 3 years. With the assistance of Washington experts, "Governor Mibelli" (*sic*) - "whose love for children is well known" - had also implemented a welfare work programme, including the creation of Mothers' Day and Sons' Day in Venezuela - an Americanism which deeply moved the visitor from Kansas (Allen, 1940: vii, 135-36, 188). At the same time, the GDF

joined efforts with the CMDF in order to create 67 new schools (17-IX-1937, *Digesto*, 1939: 409-12). Thus, the Governor seemed, after all, to have a more tender side than that perceived by left-wing Caraqueñians.

Apart from backing López's sanitary and educational policies from the GDF, the General also paid immediate attention to the urban problems of Caracas, which were being discussed in the newspapers in the days of his appointment. Traffic was the first target tackled through the Comisión Técnica created on May 21, 1936, composed of the entrepreneurs Raúl Domínguez, Oscar Augusto Machado, Luis Roche and the architect Manuel Mujica Millán. The commission was supposed to deal with the problem of pedestrians and the transit of vehicles, in terms of "Regulación y descongestión del tránsito en el centro de la ciudad de Caracas; estacionamiento de vehículos de pasajeros, de carga y otros; regulación de autobuses; adopción del sistema de señales luminosas, y demás problemas del tránsito en general" (GDF, *Memoria*, 1937: 96). In addition to the paving of 60,000 square m of streets and avenues, the commission's recommendations were gathered in the new *Ordenanza de Tránsito Urbano* of 1936, which raised the maximum speed of cars to 30 km/h, while trucks were allowed a maximum of 25; the problem of car parking was tackled in another ordinance in 1938 (GMDF, 27-VIII-1936; art. 37, CMDF, 24-XII-1936; 26-II-1938, *Digesto*, 1939: 451-82). However, everybody knew that the Caraqueñian traffic required a solution which could not be attained by mere adjustments in the traffic policing, but involved more structural changes. As publicly reckoned by newspapers proposals in 1936 and by Governor Mibelli himself later on, the question of traffic was intimately associated with the general transformation of Caracas, which could not be postponed any longer (GDF, *Memoria*, 1940: viii).

11. After writing to the CIV in April 1937 asking for advice in order to "desarrollar científicamente" the public services of the GDF, and apparently also following a presidential request, Mibelli created, on April 6, 1938, the first Dirección de Urbanismo (DU) of Caracas (GMDF, 15-IV-1937; Chiossone, 1989: 82). With technical and economic resources detached from the traditional Ingeniería Municipal, the DU was not meant to be a mere body for controlling the growth of the capital, but a planning agency which should immediately elaborate a new plan. As it was set up in justification of Mibelli's legal resolution:

"Por cuanto la ciudad de Caracas acusa un creciente aumento de población y una sensible extensión de su área urbana, complicándose cada vez más los problemas típicos de una gran urbe floreciente, cuyo ensanche y ornato están al margen de un plan armónico de desarrollo científicamente estudiado; y por cuanto Caracas no debe aplazar más su vital necesidad de ser urbanizada conforme a un vasto programa que solucione con eficacia la marcha regular de los servicios públicos de la población y prevea su futuro de gran ciudad moderna",

the DU's main target was the "estudio, confección y ejecución del amplio Plan de Urbanismo para la Ciudad de Caracas" (GDF, *Memoria*, 1939, I: 271).

Though it was supposed to be headed by an engineer, the DU's first Director was in fact the architect Guillermo Pardo Soublotte, whereas his colleague Enrique García Maldonado was appointed official architect; there were also included 3 topographers and 3 draughtsmen, amongst other members of the staff. At the same time, the urbanistic apparatus was boosted with a new Comisión Técnica de Urbanismo (CTU) - sometimes referred to as Comisión

Técnica Consultiva - composed of "expertos nacionales cuyas funciones, en razón de su profesión y vasto conocimiento de la Ciudad los ponía en capacidad de apreciar particularmente los problemas locales y sus convenientes soluciones", as Mibelli would explain later to the CMDF (GDF, *Exposición*, 1939: 13). The selected experts were the architects Carlos Guinand, Carlos Raúl Villanueva and Gustavo Wallis; the engineer Edgar Pardo Stolk, from the MOP's Dirección de Edificios y Obras de Ornato; the engineer Leopoldo Martínez Olavarría, from the Ingeniería Municipal; Pardo Soublette and García Maldonado from the DU, and Mibelli himself - though he was not to mention his own name to the councillors (Azpúrua, 1964: 31)<sup>1</sup>. The GDF's new urbanistic machinery was completed with the expertise of French professionals: on the same date as the creation of the DU, there was also celebrated a contract with the Paris-based office of Prost, Lambert, Rotival and Wegenstein, who were supposed to provide "al nuevo servicio opiniones autorizadas y aquellos programas técnicos necesarios a la buena marcha de los estudios", as well as to teach the engineers which might in future collaborate with the government (GDF, 1939: 4).

The GDF's new urbanistic staff had strong academic and cultural links with Europe, and especially with France. Though Wallis had studied in the UCV and afterwards obtained a specialization in the United States, the two other Técnicos Urbanistas had French experience: Guinand had studied in the Technische Hochschule of München, and afterwards worked for 2 years in Paris, before returning to Caracas in 1915; here he designed Art-Deco theatres and villas for the bourgeoisie of the Gomeزالato. Villanueva had studied in the École des Beaux Arts of Paris, where he graduated in 1928;

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<sup>1</sup> A student at that time, engineer Pedro Pablo Azpúrua was amongst the DU's first Topographers. He kindly handed to me his 1964 summary of the process, which I use here to complement the official information.

having abandoned his Beaux-Arts background since the mid-1930s - when he designed the new Museo de Bellas Artes, the Museo de Ciencias Naturales and other projects for López's administration - Villanueva nonetheless kept the "vision d'ensemble" acquired in the Parisian school. Apart from them, Machado, Roche and Martínez Olavarría had also been living or studying in Paris during their youth (Gasparini and Posani, 1969: 365; Negrón, 91: 147).

Though by July 1937 the French team had already written to the Governor offering their services, the Parisian education of this first "véritable école d'urbanisme" of Caracas was later used by Rotival in order to justify the fact that the Venezuelan government "s'adressait au Gouvernement français pour lui demander des collaborateurs" (Rotival, 1951: 71; Martín, 1994: 347, 353). The ultimate reasons for the liaison remain unsolved: the original contact allegedly came from Guinand's acquaintance with Wegenstein in Paris - according to the report recently given by Martínez Olavarría (Negrón, 1991: 148). However, attention must not be distracted from the real significance of the GDF's urbanistic innovations: the creation of the DU and the CTU was not only Mibelli's first step towards the transformation of Caracas, but also a milestone in the creation of a national urbanism. As Rotival himself would recognize some years later, the first "équipe Vénézuélienne" in urbanism was born, which also represented a significant breakthrough for the architectural profession - thus called on for the first time to assume its function in urban planning, in a professional milieu up to then dominated by civil engineers (Rotival, 1951: 71; Zawisza, 1985: 46). After all the doubts and dilemmas in the urban debate of the democratic capital, Governor Mibelli had opted for Parisian charms, while his team of national and French professionals was to father the first urbanism of Venezuela. Thanks to its

academic prestige among the former students in the capital of the *belle époque*, Paris was about to gamble its last card in the urbanistic showdown of Caracas.

12. From the very beginning, the DU's main activities were focused on the process of designing the urban plan for Caracas. In his annual report at the CMDF at the end of 1938, Mibelli summarized the tasks of the new office in two phases: the first one was the "estudio metodológico de lo existente, proyecto y planificación, teniendo como norma el aspecto sui géneris de la ciudad española de Caracas, y cuidando que lo original no sea ahogado por la copia servil de ciudades modernas que no tienen la misma topografía"; the second phase was the elaboration of projects as such (GDF, *Exposición*, 1939, I: xv). The same stages were basically confirmed in Pardo Soublette's report, where the DU's director mentioned that two solutions had been presented, of which the CTU had approved the more interesting one (GDF, *Exposición*, 1939, II: 373).

The existence of previous proposals for the expansion of Caracas had been talked about since the democratic debate about the urban reforms was launched in 1936. In particular, there was a plan developed by Luis E. Chataing and sponsored by the MOP and the AVI, which had been presented to the CMDF in 1937 when it apparently gained the support of the councillors of the Comisión de Obras Urbanas, Fomento y Ornato Público (MOP, *Memoria*, 1938; Azpúrua, 1964: 31; Martín, 1991: 79-80). Apart from the alleged lack of structure that Martínez Olavarría criticized in the MOP proposal (Martínez Olavarría and others, 1983: 57), however, there seemed to have been a political dimension in the fact that the CTU did not find it to be

interesting enough. Indeed, the left-wing coalition having triumphed for the first time in the municipal elections of 1937 and 1938, Mibelli apparently decided to bypass the councillors' claims, including their preferences for the MOP proposal. Municipal sabotage of this type seemed to be a normal gambit in a country where local administrations represented the best way for new political forces to break through the *ancien regime* - a penetration that the "petit Haussmann" was not going to allow from the anti-communist garrison of the GDF (Sanín, 1982: 135, 264; Martín, 1991: 79-82; 1994: 345-53). All this political intrigue could explain the Consejeros Técnicos' secretive attitude, perceived by Senator Allen when visiting the DU premises, on the eve of the final presentation of the new plan:

"The Bureau of Urbanization in Caracas is a competent-looking building filled with studious men working over drafting boards. You wouldn't think of it as a place where they are concealing any secrets. As a matter of fact, they are getting ready to spring upon Caracas a surprise that will reverberate. The members of the planning body are devoting their entire time now to the scheme of remaking the city of Caracas. They assured me that they had not publicly discussed this plan, regarding it yet in a premature stage, and that I was the first individual, outside the members of the committee on urbanization and the ministers, to be told of the proposed scheme." (Allen, 1940: 272).

In those days when World War II was about to break out - and the Senator noticed that the crooked cross of the Nazis flew in the streets of the city "in more numbers than the flag of any nation save Venezuela" - the climate of expectation concerning the new proposal for Caracas was certainly reaching its peak (Allen, 1940: 66). Bergamín then publicly complained about the delay over the new law for the sprawling capital, whose urbanization was "como el cáncer, avanzando, avanzando" (1959: 34). Despite the criticisms, the Governor just seemed to be proud of the fact that the boom of the

Venezuelan capital was not diminished by the outbreak of the War: the DF population had increased more than 34% since 1936, while the city still grew at a rate of 5 houses a day (GDF, *Memoria*, 1940: vi; MF, *Séptimo Censo*, 1944: 4).

13. It was in the middle of 1939 that the Governor presented to the DF councillors the long-concealed surprise for the transformation of the capital - a presentation which remains the best manifesto of Mibelli's urbanistic conception. Despite his original plea for the Spanish character of the capital, the Governor recognized that the colonial structure of Caracas could no longer be kept untouched, due to its circulatory, architectural and hygienical constraints:

"Dejar la Ciudad en su estado actual equivale a abandonarla a su propia decadencia. La intensa circulación automovilística en calles que fueron trazadas para el tráfico de recuas o carretas, constituye un serio inconveniente para las actividades de la comunidad. La pérdida de tiempo que sufre la población y, en consecuencia la pérdida de dinero, sería por sí solo suficiente para justificar un cambio radical.

"La Ciudad actual data de la época colonial y ha conservado hasta estos últimos años la fisonomía que tanto nos agrada. Sin embargo, el aumento considerable de la población -alrededor de cien mil personas desde el año de 1926- tiende a modificar su carácter. La tendencia cada vez más patente de elevar el gabarito de las casas nos indica que dentro de poco tiempo la Ciudad adquirirá un nuevo aspecto. Permitir construcciones elevadas en calles angostas, en manzanas profundas donde no se reservan luces suficientes que la higiene aconseja, constituyen una grave imprevisión desde cualquier aspecto que se le considere.

"La Ciudad, en su esfuerzo natural de expansión, querrá desplazarse rápidamente, desde sus calles estrechas hacia superficies más amplias, aireadas y soleadas. Los lugares modernos de hoy, reservados a los



habitantes, se cubrirán de inmuebles comerciales y la ciudad actual se tornará en una ciudad antigua e insalubre donde no podrán vivir sino elementos infelices de la población. Cuando esto ocurra los propietarios, al contemplar cómo se desvalorizan poco a poco sus propiedades, nos reprocharán nuestra desidia así como hoy en día tienden a reprocharnos nuestra previsión." (GDF, *Exposición*, 1939: 14-15).

Though pleading on behalf of the community, the Governor seemed to be more concerned about the owners' future reproaches over the deterioration of the centre of Caracas. In addition to the fact that Venezuelans were - among Latin Americans - "los últimos en considerar el problema del acondicionamiento de la ciudad y esto debido a circunstancias por todos conocidas", the reconstruction of Caracas was urged as an economic, social and architectural necessity for the sake of the anxious owners. This functional understanding of the urban renewal was finally supported by Mibelli's own conception of urbanism as a balance between so-called ornamental and necessary works:

"Tendemos en fin a disipar el concepto erróneo que el público tiene a menudo sobre urbanismo. A veces se califican como 'Obras de Ornato' los trabajos que en realidad constituyen 'Obras Necesarias'. Si en el momento de la ejecución lográramos una mejor agrupación de los inmuebles y reglamentáramos las fachadas de los mismos sobre ciertas plazas y avenidas, uniríamos 'el ornato con la necesidad'.

"Pero es necesario recordar, ante todo, que el urbanismo es el arte de hacer que los hombres convivan en una forma sana, agradable y útil. Arte que brinda la posibilidad de dar a las clases laboriosas, en las que cifran el porvenir del país, alojamientos higiénicos y, al mismo tiempo, el llamado a prestar a la ciudad el aspecto digno de una verdadera Capital." (GDF, *Exposición*, 1939: 15-16).

The General was about to realize his ambition of dressing post-Gómez

Caracas as a capital worthy of the Government and the visitors, the investors and the community. The Guzmanian élan thus seemed to revive once again in Caraquenian history, but this time in the context of a real necessity for urban transformation and more economic and technical resources. With his own vision of the urbanism necessary for the urban renewal of Caracas, the Governor had assembled for the first time the previous strands of Venezuela's urbanistic evolution. On the one hand was Guzmanian urban art, with its contents of ornamentation and urbanity; on the other hand were the necessary components inherited from the hygienic and progressive agenda of the Gómez era. Though he insisted on calling it an art, the Governor had officially introduced technical urbanism into the Venezuelan administration.

Before we find out the contents of the sweeping plans which astonished Senator Allen and required such a presentation by Mibelli, let us glance at the background of the French urbanists who were orchestrating the urban renewal of Caracas. By so doing, let us also trace the influence of French and European urbanism in the the planning process which was taking place in major Latin American capitals, a process which should allow us to see the case of Caracas in a continental perspective.

"Mais nous voyages nous ont appris, plus encore, que la France avait une mission réelle... Nous avons entendu cela dans la rue à Buenos Aires comme dans les salons d'ambassade à México, dans des confidences à Santiago ou à Caracas, à Salonique comme à Damas, à Tananarive comme à Lillehammer"

Gaston Bardet, *Naissance et Méconnaissance de l'Urbanisme* (1951)

## THE MISSION OF FRENCH URBANISM

14. On the basis of their previous agenda on public health, housing and

urban extension, by the 1910s Germany and Britain had succeeded in founding town planning as a new statutory discipline. In addition to professional and academic breakthroughs, the passage of the Adickes Law in Germany in 1901 and the issue of the *Housing and Town Planning Act* in Britain in 1909 made the new practice compulsory on the local level in both countries (Sutcliffe, 1981: 171-73, 178). Leading Europe's contribution to the international movement of town planning, they also hosted key international events which featured the scientific character of the new discipline: in London there was held the first Town Planning Conference in the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1910; in Germany, there had been a Congress of German Cities and Plans in Dresden by 1903, followed by the Berlin Allgemeine Städtebau Ausstellung (1910), and the Düsseldorf Internationale Städtebau Ausstellung (1912). Reports of the last two events were compiled by Werner Hegemann in *Der Städtebau* (1911-13), which set the German tradition in perspective against the urbanism of the rest of Europe. At the same time, specialized journals started to divulge the new discipline from both countries: *Der Städtebau* (1904), edited by Sitte and Theodor Goecke; Berlin's *Städtebau Vorträge* (1908) and *Stadtbaukunst* (1920); London's *Garden City and Town Planning* (1904) and the *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* (1914); and Liverpool's *Town Planning Review* (1910), amongst others (Ashworth, 1954: 180, 190; Collins, 1986: 107-109; Cherry, 1992: 72-73).

Despite the appearance of new magazines such as the Paris *La Cité Jardin* (1912) and *La Vie Urbaine* (1919), post-Haussmannian France experienced a delay which was ultimately due to its theoretical and legal backwardness in relation to Germany and Britain (Choay, 1983: 174, 239-41). After the first cycle of Haussmannization was exhausted, urban innovations came to be

engineered from the Musée Social - an institution founded on August 31, 1894, with the purpose of providing public information "des institutions et organisations sociales qui ont pour objet et pour résultat d'améliorer la situation matérielle et morale des travailleurs" (*Le Musée...*, 1897: 3-5, 15). Although the Musée's initial structure had included sections for housing and hygiene, it was not until 1908 that there was created a proper section for urban and rural hygiene, which by the 1910s developed plans for the extension of the Paris region. The section was masterminded by Eugène Hénard, whose *Études sur les transformations de Paris* (1903-1913) embraced the vast agenda of the post-Haussmannian metropolis - from the conversion of fortifications into parks, boulevards and housing areas, to the changes required in the circulation system in order to assimilate the new means of transport - while setting in perspective the case of Paris against metropolises like London, Berlin and Moscow. Apart from the proposal of a system of parks in 1909, Hénard's work at the section underpinned the passage in 1919 of the so-called *Loi Cordunet*, the first planning law of France, which was to be reformulated in 1924 (Wolf, 1968: 84-85; Cohen, 1982: xiv; Gaudin, 1985: 86-92).

With his far-sighted proposals for "les villes de l'avenir" - such as the segregation of traffic into different levels - Hénard also inspired the more progressive strand of French urbanism, whose leadership was to be assumed by Le Corbusier from the 1920s (Cohen, 1982: viii; Gaudin, 1985: 25-40). In his *Urbanisme* (1925), the editor of *L'Esprit Nouveau* paid tribute to Hénard's agenda for the great cities, urging for functional approaches and skills for the new discipline, such as the use of statistics or the segregation of traffic. Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (1923) had also recognized the contribution of Tony Garnier's "Cité Industrielle" and Auguste Perret's "Ville-

Tours", whose "conjugaison des solutions utilitaires et des solutions esthétiques" made possible the adoption of high-rise buildings, the assemblage of services "selon l'heureuse expérience américaine", and the liberation of space for circulation and sports (1923: 38-47, 219). This book also formulated one of Le Corbusier's revolutionary dogmas - "La maison est une machine à habiter" - which was long commented on by Bergamín and other architects in Caracas. This progressive strand of French urbanism was to reach a vaster audience after Le Corbusier, from 1928, championed the meetings of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), whose functionalist principles were to be gathered in *La Charte d'Athènes* (1942).

But there was a more conservative group of French urbanists who had worked with Hénard at the Musée Social: Donat-Alfred Agache, Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier and Henri Prost - amongst others - were linked to the constitution of the Société Française des Urbanistes (SFU) in 1913, and to the teaching of urbanism in the École des Beaux-Arts. When some of them were summoned by Maréchal Lyautey to participate in the urbanistic enterprises of French colonialism, the last catalyst was added to the constitution of the so-called École Française d'Urbanisme (EFU), which made of France one of the big exporters of the new discipline, despite its relative backwardness in Europe. Apart from incorporating new trends of design coming from Hénard, Tony Garnier and Raymond Unwin, the EFU's eclectic basis also included the artistic tradition launched by Sitte and continued by the City Beautiful movement, as well as the grand manners of Beaux-Arts plans (Gaudin, 1985: 58-60; Lejeune, 1994: 179-80). Although some of the members of the EFU tried to modernize this heterogeneous heritage, their respect for the formalism of the École des Beaux Arts always

remained as a basic difference from the functionalism of Le Corbusier, who rejected the Beaux-Arts principles as "des dogmas, des recettes, des trucs" which led to "une pratique périlleuse" (1923: 145). But, despite the criticisms, the EFU's new version of the urbanism of regularization would prove to be in some cases a more realistic and exportable alternative than Le Corbusier's utopian progressivism (Choay, 1983: 253).

15. When celebrating the 20 years of the first *Loi Cordunet* in 1939, Marcel Poète still regretted the political circumstances which had caused the fact that France "s'est laissée distancer en urbanisme par l'étranger"; however, the urban historian looked with great hope at the promising task of fellow countrymen who intended "réaliser au dehors ce qu'ils ne peuvent faire chez eux". Invoking the "qualité universelle" of the French spirit hinted at by Pascal in the XVII century, Poète tried to convey to the French urbanist how his "œuvre" around the world should be performed "en accord avec le génie de son pays" (1939: iii-5). On the same occasion, Gaston Bardet expressed his firm belief that the urbanistic work was a cornerstone of the "mission réelle" of France as an ambassador of Western civilization, not only in the dependencies but also in other parts of the world. In this respect, one of France's traditional devotees was Latin America, where Bardet had heard the clamour for the French mission "dans la rue à Buenos Aires comme dans le salons d'ambassade à México, dans des confidences à Santiago ou à Caracas..." (1951: 396).

Despite their enthusiastic plea, the urban historians knew that French urbanism was just awaking from its prolonged lethargy of Beaux Arts, which Bardet aptly christened as "Haussmannisme amélioré": "Celui-ci règne

encore à grands coups de diagonales, d'étoiles d'alignements rigides de blocs compacts, de formes d'Ecole" (1939: iii-3). Apart from the historians, for nearly two decades Le Corbusier had been denouncing this use of never-ending axes as "une calamité de l'architecture" (1923: 51); however, this "Haussmanisme amélioré" had apparently inspired some of the proposals of the EFU members in Latin American capitals since the 1910s. The EFU's influence started with Alvear's 1910 plan for Buenos Aires - a web of diagonals designed by Joseph Bouvard and later complemented with Forestier's greenery. The latter submitted another proposal in 1923, still with echoes of Napoleon III Paris; Léon Jaussely made a similar attempt in 1926, while Forestier laid out parks in Havana (Berjman, 1994: 208-13; Duverger, 1994). At the end of the same decade, Agache masterminded a plan for Rio, whose French edition - *La Remodelation d'une Capitale* (1932) - claimed to combine biological concepts coming from Poëte's evolutionism with scientific methods taught at the École Supérieure d'Urbanisme. But the introduction made by the SFU's vice-president dwelt for too long upon his belief that the new discipline was also an art of embellishment, intuition and imagination - which probably prevented him from conveying a more progressive message (Agache, 1932: xviii-xx, 93).

A definite message of modernity is what Latin Americans tried to get from inviting Le Corbusier for a visit to Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Sao Paulo and Rio - a tour he was to report on enthusiastically in his *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (1930). His devoted hosts of the Amigos del Arte society of the Argentinian capital did not mind that the visitor offered them a preconceived version of the 1925 "Plan Voisin de Paris" - which had attempted the introduction of "une cité d'affaires au coeur même de la ville", a progressive initiative which was allegedly rejected by Parisian

academicians. But the visionary thought that the Plan Voisin could work out in New-World lands: with its massive City dominating the Atlantic, 3.3-million Buenos Aires could easily become "l'une des plus dignes villes du monde", expected to replace the metropolitan role of New York, which had just been "le premier geste de la civilisation contemporaine" (Le Corbusier, 1930: 167, 172-74, 202). By focusing on his own extravaganza for the Argentinian capital, Corb probably tried to avoid any polemic with the proposals of Forestier and Jausseley; he was to do the same with Agache's plan for Rio, where the visitor did not deliver any lecture (Liernur and Pshepiurca, 1991: 58; Pérez Oyarzún, 1991: 25-27; Crasemann, 1995: 211).

Sailing back to Europe on board the liner *Lutetia* of the Compagnie Sud-Atlantique, Le Corbusier was still overexcited with the fresh memories of the vast and heterodox continent - from the 1,000 m-high and 200 km/h flights over the Parana and the Uruguay rivers, to his daring excursions into the Negroes' *favellas* of Rio. Even frivolous experiences seemed to acquire a new meaning in the New World: in Sao Paulo, Le Corbusier had attended a performance of Josephine Baker "dans un idiot spectacle de variétés"; but this time she had sung *Baby* with "une si intense et dramatique sensibilité" that Corb was brought to tears. The architect then designed a choreography for the ebony goddess, when the two luminaries embarked together from Sao Paulo, on board of the *Giulio Cesare*. In view of all these invigorating experiences, the champion of modernism confirmed that he had perceived in South America a renewed energy capable of breaking up all academic methods, "comme se classent en ce jour, en architecture, les procédés de l'âge de pierre venus jusqu'à Haussmann..." (Le Corbusier, 1930: 12-14; Pérez Oyarzún, 1991: 20, 25). But, above all, the French citizen felt proud of having represented the spiritual value that the "Ville Lumière" still had in



Latin America: "Cette valeur spirituelle de Paris m'a valu de pouvoir à Buenos-Ayres, à Montevideo, à Saint-Paul, à Rio, dire ce que j'avais à dire, 'au nom de ...'. Ce voyage devient une mission". The Parisians' crusade was in accordance with the South Americans' Latin vocation, which should prevent them from copying the Anglo-Saxon example of the North (1930: 2, 245). With such a plea, the CIAM leader seemed thus to confirm that the prestigious mission of French urbanism should stand over his ideological differences with the EFU members and urban historians - at least in the case of Latin America.

16. German ambassadors also offered to foster the emerging urbanism of Latin America. Werner Hegemann was invited to Buenos Aires in 1931, where he was hosted by a less elite but more pragmatic group which was not satisfied with either the EFU's proposals or Le Corbusier's prefabricated plans. The German master tried to be tactful and focused on the particularities of the city: his reappraisal of the colonial *damero* was a subtle criticism of Bouvard's Haussmannesque diagonals, while his new "Plano Regulador" was an instrument more comprehensive than Corb's architectural sketches. References to the German world were unavoidable, though: the projection of the film *Die Stadt von Morgen* - which reported the advantages of long-range planning in the Ruhr basin - was a questionable attempt to convey the importance of the regional background for local urbanism; at the same time, the *Stadtbahn* of Vienna and Berlin were recommended as examples for the inner-city railroads which should link Buenos Aires with satellite towns (Crasemann, 1995: 210-19). Also the Austrian urbanist Karl Brünner designed a plan for Santiago in 1933 - approved five years later. During the rest of the decade, Brünner

masterminded the municipal office and plan for Bogotá, where he had translated his *Manual de Urbanismo* (1939-40). Plans for other capitals allegedly incorporated partial ideas from Sitte, Buls and Otto Wagner (Hardoy, 1989: 268). Meanwhile, despite the lack of political support for his experimental proposals, Le Corbusier's interest in Latin America was still alive during those years: he visited Brazil again in 1936 and had his "Plan Director" for Buenos Aires relaunched in 1938; a plan for Bogotá was devised in 1947. By this time, the CIAM urbanism represented only one among other options of more vernacular modernity; however, Le Corbusier's architecture continued to be a seductive influence on new generations of Latin architects and planners (Hardoy, 1990: 37-39; Rodríguez and others, 1991: 42-44).

All of those plans and invitations were possible on the basis of the new technical apparatus, consolidated in most of the continent by the 1930s, when innovations started to be exchanged at the international events. Though Chile had celebrated national congresses on architecture and urbanism from 1934, the first international Congreso de Urbanismo was held in Buenos Aires in 1935; later on, the first Congreso Interamericano de Municipalidades took place in Havana in 1938, and the second in Santiago in 1941. In relation to housing, the first Congreso Panamericano de Vivienda Popular also took place in Buenos Aires in 1939, and the sixteenth International Congress on Planning and Housing was held in Mexico City in 1938. The fifteenth International Congress of Architects held in Washington in 1939 also represented a good opportunity for Latin professionals. On the administrative level, national or municipal offices of urban planning were created for Santiago, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rio, Lima and Bogotá; most of them were supported by new professional associations and

urban research centres. The new offices were in charge of the first generation of local planners, mainly architects coming from the enhanced schools of Santiago and Montevideo, Rio and Bogotá (Violich, 1944: 157-70; Hardoy, 1990: 22, 46).

When Francis Violich met some of those technicians on his 1941-42 journey across the continent, the North American planner noticed that Latin professionals were "European-trained, or prepared for the technical field in their own country by European-trained professors". In addition to their thorough technicality, Latin professionals frequently had "a broader understanding of their own and related fields than would be provided in similar training in the United States" (Violich, 1944: 158). More than their North American colleagues, Latin urbanists also tended "to philosophize about the significance of the city's pattern, about the broad human objective of planning". Knowing European capitals "by heart", some of the planners visited by Violich were influenced most of all by the philosophical and artistic tradition of French urbanism, epitomized in books such as Poète's *Paris. Son évolution créatrice* (1938), which the visitor found in the planners' libraries. Even in the early 1940s, the urbanistic mission of France in Latin America was not only proclaimed by Le Corbusier and the French historians, but also confirmed by the North American planner. However, the mission was not to last for long, at least among the "younger practising architects and planners", who started to "look towards the United States rather than to Europe" (Violich, 1944: 169, 173).

17. The French team contracted for the urban plan of Caracas had a genealogy ultimately related to the EFU. Henri Prost had been an assiduous

member of the Musée Social, where he worked with Hénard and George Risler. The winner of the 1902 Prix de Rome had also been in contact with the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts until 1913, when he went to Morocco, summoned by General Lyautey's urgent requests to the new professionals of urbanism. By those years, Prost thought that a lack of administrative direction explained why French urbanism had come to a dead halt after Haussmann; believing in strong heads and big projects which might restore the past grandeur of France, the Beaux-Arts master honoured the Haussmannian tradition of great axes in Casablanca, Fez and Marrakech (Rabinow, 1989: 237-38; Wright, 1991: 105-106). Back in France since the end of World War I, Prost worked in different projects of regional planning, including the 1934 Plan for Paris; by those years the veteran master was already recognized as an exponent of "ce que Pascal appelait l'esprit de finesse et l'esprit de géométrie" - namely, an excellent ambassador of the French mission ("Henri Prost...", 1965: 2-4).

In the 1930s, Prost's Parisian office contracted Maurice Rotival for a project in Algiers. A former student of the École Centrale and member of Le Corbusier's generation, Rotival went to teach at Yale University, where he could distance himself from both the Beaux-Arts formalism and the extreme functionalism of CIAM (Ragon, 1971-78, II: 255; "Maurice Rotival...", 1980). In the mid-1930s, Rotival's balanced vision of French urbanism was mirrored in the article "Les Grandes Ensembles" (1935) - a claim for modern housing patterns which also recognized the artistic contribution of earlier European traditions. On the one hand, the author praised the rigidity of the housing schemes of Le Corbusier and Gropius, conceiving "l'aménagement d'une cité idéale" as a combination of functions, such as "L'autostrade, la voie primaire à grand trafic et commerciale, les voies secondaires de service

automobile des habitations et les chemins tertiaires permettant la distribution de chacune des unités d'escaliers". On the other hand, Prost's associate recognized that the achievements of modernity were made possible by the uniformity of baroque and Haussmannian urbanism; the latter was epitomized by the bourgeois places and the big axes - such as the Rue de Rivoli, the Avenue de l'Opera and the Champs Elysées - which in some ways were the predecessors of twentieth-century motorways (Rotival, 1935: 65-67).

Though Prost's office also included Jacques Lambert - an urbanist with experience in Mexico and Chile during the 1920s - the EFU heritage of the office was preserved in the connection between the veteran boss and the youngest associate. Prost obviously had had a more direct liaison with Hénard, the Musée Social's work, and the great aims of colonial urbanism; Rotival, on the other hand, had a theoretical understanding of all of those ingredients, including the work of Hénard - who was to be celebrated as the "urbaniste de Paris" in a later article by Rotival (1960). In terms of design, Prost's tribute to the Haussmannian tradition in Morocco was continued in Rotival's respect for regularization and monumentality. All the theoretical ingredients of French colonial urbanism were thus represented in the technical team called up for the mission in Caracas (Martín, 1991: 84-88).

18. Unlike Maréchal Lyautey's colonial enterprises, Mibelli's project could never aspire to removing to Caracas the veteran Prost, who supervised the Master Plan of Istanbul in the late 1930s; instead, the two deputy associates were appointed to respond to the Governor's request. From the beginning, Lambert apparently felt so at home that he was to stay in the tropical city for

the rest of his life; but it was the young Rotival who rapidly became the leading voice of the mission. By the time of Senator Allen's visit to the DU premises, it was clear that the works were under the control of Rotival, who already had "many noted accomplishments to his credit, having been connected with important urbanization work in Toulon, Paris, Stambul and many other cities" - at least according to the resumé given by himself to the Senator (Allen, 1940: 272). With so many international achievements, it was not an exaggeration when the Colombian Osorio praised the Caracas government for having contracted "uno de los primeros urbanistas del mundo" (1943: 60).

It was not difficult for the middle-aged Rotival to assume his role as the ambassador of the prestigious mission. "Tu ne comprends pas!", he would sometimes reprimand the young members of the Venezuelan team, according to their own recollection of the first meetings with the French envoys. However, at least Martínez Olavarría does not seem to be resentful of the uneven terms of their relationship with Rotival: "El ejercía de verdad la dirección en la elaboración del plan y su opinión era la definitiva: no en vano era el maestro y nosotros unos bisoños discípulos" (Martínez Olavarría and others, 1983: 63; Negrón, 1991: 153). The master gained the team's respect with his new methodological framework, which combined both evolutionist and philosophical ingredients of French urbanism with the functionalist analysis of modern town planning. Under Rotival's guidance, the DU first elaborated a diagnosis of the evolution of Caracas throughout different epochs, in terms of population growth and movement, traffic and transport, climate, infrastructure, etc. Secondly, in order to formulate the proposal, the traditional social, philosophical, demographic, geographic and economic study of the centre and the suburbs was complemented by the

introduction of new systematic instruments of analysis, such as "zoning" and the hierarchy of roads. Caracas was thereby divided into functional areas: commercial, industrial, residential and recreational, completed by the district of public buildings; residential zones were also subdivided according to social strata (GDF, *Exposición*, 1939, II: 373-75; GDF, 1939: 10-12).

All that new framework must have been an urbanistic revelation for the local team: "Cuando llega Rotival a Venezuela, aquí nadie sabe lo que significa la palabra 'Urbanismo'", is the way some members of the DU now look back at the impressive methodology of the French. Martínez Olavarría confirmed that despite their incipient interest in the new discipline - fuelled by their acquaintance with Brünner's *Manual* - the Caraquenian technicians had up to then practised a mere architectural urbanism in the Guzmanian style; now, from the arrival of Rotival on, that fragmentary approach was to be encompassed in a new macrocosmic or global vision of the whole city, which often relied on the French urbanist's intuition (Martínez Olavarría and others, 1983: 57, 64; Negrón, 1991: 147-49). This is why - despite the claim that the existence of other proposals testified to a previous sense of urbanism in the Caracas milieu - the interaction of the French envoys with the DU technicians tends to be taken as the birth certificate of modern urbanism in Venezuela (Morales Tucker and others, 1990: 91; Martín, 1991: 79; 1994: 353). Though the birth was one of most belated of the continent, the fathering of Venezuelan urbanism was another credit of the French mission in Latin America.

"Esta ciudad fué, muy pronto, un centro de atracción universal, y las grandes Exposiciones levantadas sobre las nuevas explanadas consagraron el genio de Haussmann, el creador"

"Plan Monumental de Caracas" (1939)

## THE MONUMENTAL PLAN OF CARACAS

19. The French envoys' colonial vision of the world is evident in the introduction to the so-called "Plan Monumental de Caracas" (PMC)<sup>2</sup> - which served to launch the *Revista Municipal del Distrito Federal* (RMDF) in 1939. Highlighting the privileged location of the Venezuelan capital, the document began with geographical and ethnic analogies between the Mediterranean Sea - "punto donde se encontraron y mezclaron grandes civilizaciones" - and the Antilles' Sea - "centro de unión de las civilizaciones provenientes del Norte y del Sur del Continente Americano" (GDF, 1939: 17). Apart from being very suggestive, the maritime analogy also hinted at the colonialist idea that South America was the Africa of the New World, whose complete maturity would only be reached on the basis of economic and cultural exchange with the Northern hemisphere. The future importance of the Venezuelan capital was not only due to its strategic location in the Caribbean but also to its relative proximity to the centres of the civilized world. Covering a distance of 3,500 kms, the trip between New York and Caracas was expected to last less than 10 hours in the near future, whereas Europe would be reached in less than 24 hours (GDF, 1939: 18). Caracas thus looked towards the exterior, as the great capitals do:

"Es indispensable que la capital de un país mire hacia el exterior. Es por esto que las grandes ciudades del mundo y particularmente de los Estados

<sup>2</sup> With no official denomination in the original document, the PMC has also received other names, such as "Plan Rector", "Plan Urbano" and "Plano Regulador de Caracas". I have adopted the most usual denomination of PMC, since "monumental" is a term which repeatedly appears in the original text, and certainly summarizes the spirit of the proposal.



Unidos de Norte América, como Nueva York, Washington, San Francisco, etc., crecieron automáticamente en aquellas regiones donde el intercambio era más fácil. La misma observación podemos hacerla con respecto a la ciudad de Londres, aparentemente descentrada si la consideramos en relación con Inglaterra; pero en el justo sitio si se la considera en relación con los Dominios; lo mismo ocurre con Argelia, situada en el extremo Norte de los territorios africanos; pero sobre las márgenes del Mar Mediterráneo que le trajo la civilización. Caracas, pues, ocupa, asimismo, el centro de la costa sobre el Caribe. Geográficamente su situación es notable y sería ilógico, aún si dispusiésemos de medios para hacerlo, tratar de encontrar un sitio más ventajoso para la Capital de los Estados Unidos de Venezuela." (GDF, 1939: 21-22).

At the same time, Caracas was the capital of a country whose democratic renaissance and economic boom made it possible to benefit "de todo el utillaje moderno y de los métodos más eficaces y racionales que la experiencia secular de otros países aconseja emplear para el perfeccionamiento del mecanismo administrativo". On the basis of its advantageous location and its condition as capital of the wealthiest country of the region, Caracas should therefore take on its geographical role as leader of the cultural, industrial and commercial exchange, as well as its function as the capital of the new civilization emerging in the Caribbean.

"Así, pues, no sería aventurado afirmar que en lo futuro, Caracas podrá ser la Capital del Sur de esa nueva civilización caribe, como San Luis, sobre el Mississipi, será la capital del Norte. México y La Habana correrán al Oeste y al Este del círculo armonioso donde se desarrollará, dentro de poco, con una vitalidad extraordinaria, la nueva civilización americana" (GDF, 1939: 19).

Given this promising future, the PMC's final object was to prepare the Venezuelan capital for that "misión envidiable que le ofrece su destino",

according to a hypothesis that was a fundamental merit of Rotival - as Martínez Olavarría recognized later on (Negrón, 1991: 148). The scenario was thus set out in terms of regional domination and hierarchy: though subordinate to New York and the European capitals, Caracas could become the second-rate metropolis of a new civilization of the tropics. From its very introduction, French urbanism had thus stamped its geopolitical touch on the plan for the democratic capital.

20. The problems which demanded a new organization for Caracas were not really stated in the core chapters of the PMC, but were included in the final summary - apparently based on the previous studies carried out by the AVI. The 1936 population of Caracas DF was 283,418, which represented more than three times the 1873 population. Since 1926, the demographic growth in Caracas had been similar to or even higher than in cities of equal importance, such as Saint Louis, Baltimore, Louisville, Bogotá and Algiers. As in most of the important cities of the world, this increase was mainly due to rural-urban migration. The crowded centre required the most urgent action: with 193 inhabitants / ha, the density in the central districts of Caracas was comparable with Algiers and Bogotá - 196 and 192, respectively. In these areas, residence was being replaced by commerce, which aggravated the traffic congestion due to the narrowness of traditional streets. Beyond the centre - and apart from the aforementioned problem of traffic - there were the difficulties due to urban sprawl and the shortage of housing for new working-class groups (GDF, 1939: 21, 37-39). Although most of this agenda was raised by the AVI's reports, it was to be endorsed by Rotival as the very *raison d'être* of the PMC - as he would confirm some years later (1951: 71).

As in Governor Mibelli's presentation to the councillors, the PMC's definition of urbanism protested against the traditional misconception of a superfluous ornamental art; instead, urbanism was an economic necessity and an investment for the future of Caracas. The fantastic effects of urbanism - explained with a certain naiveté - were supposed to benefit all the components of the city:

"Una ciudad bien concebida, con calles trazadas para la circulación automovilística, economiza tiempo y, por lo tanto, dinero. Economiza combustible, agentes de tráfico, accidentes, etc. Una ciudad trazada, lógicamente vé disminuir el costo de los servicios municipales, de sus cloacas, acueductos, aseo urbano, electricidad, teléfono, etc., obteniéndose así, una economía de impuestos de la que se beneficia toda la población. Finalmente, una ciudad bien construída, es hermosa y agradable. Y allí donde se vive confortable y plácidamente, desaparecen las dificultades sociales, los trastornos políticos y los odios de clases que tanto entorpecen la economía humana." (GDF, 1939: 20).

As the best illustration of the long-term advantages of an urbanistic plan, the example of Haussmann was called up. The hygiene problems of mid-nineteenth-century Paris could be solved only because of the indomitable energy of its Prefect, whose creative genius confronted malevolent opposition in order to transform the city into a great capital. The urban plan had been so beneficial that, without further investments until 1914, Paris became the centre of universal attraction for tourists and the greatest fortunes of the world. There was no doubt: Haussmann's plan "pagó con creces todos los sacrificios e inversiones que requirió su realización". In view of such a conclusive example, the problem of the new organization for Caracas did not have to start from zero, but should rather imitate the way modern legislations combined urbanistic goals with economic means. "Por

lo tanto, no nos proponemos una aventura. No hay nada por descubrir", was the docile conclusion of the PMC's theoretical premises (GDF, 1939: 19-20).

Though apparently limited and obsolete, this theoretical framework was in fact appropriate for the political aims of the PMC, whilst the reference to Haussmann plan was not completely out of context - as has been claimed at times (Zawisza, 1989: 18). On the one hand, the glorification of the prowess shown by Prefect of the Seine justified the delay of Parisian urbanism - a delay which both the French envoys and the local team had to justify to themselves and to their audience. On the other hand, the consecration of Haussmann's economic and political saga boosted and vindicated Mibelli's endeavours to provide Caracas with a worthy plan. Perhaps the PMC did not require more theoretical elaboration.

21. The polyvalent example of Paris was used many times to infer different conclusions about the proposals for Caracas. Starting with the definition of the region of urbanism - an innovative concept probably introduced by Rotival, who had already followed the path of his boss in the field of regional planning - the study took into account the interaction of central Caracas with all of the sites within a distance of one hour by car, approximately. Nevertheless, the definition of a Caracas region seemed to rely ultimately on the example of Paris: the latter would be incomplete if deprived of its immediate surroundings, such as Versailles, Fontainebleau, Compiègne, Dieppe and Deauville (GDF, 1939: 22). The example of the Haussmannian capital was also used to solve the PMC's great dilemma: urban renewal or urban extension of the centre? According to the experts, Caracas presented a vicious movement towards the east; if boosted by the urban extension, this

tendency would allegedly bring about a devaluation of the centre in the future. The risks of that scenario were illustrated by Haussmann's decision to urbanize western Paris, which had supposedly fuelled the deterioration of central slums, whose clearance and sanitation costs proved to be very expensive in the long term (GDF, 1939: 24). So learning again from the Haussmannian experience, the PMC's first propositions opted for a sort of urban renewal which sought:

- "1. Solucionar el problema del tráfico mediante avenidas capaces de absorber la masa total de vehículos, creando así una amplia circulación Este-Oeste y, abriendo, al mismo tiempo, las diagonales necesarias.
2. Encausar el sentido principal de la circulación por medio de una avenida central que, por sus proporciones y las fachadas de sus edificios dé a la Ciudad un aspecto monumental imprimiéndole un carácter especial.
3. Crear plazas monumentales en donde el tráfico se reparta fácilmente y el movimiento del público pueda ser ordenado durante las grandes festividades" (GDF, 1939: 25).

For the urban area of Caracas, there were also proposed the identification of grounds for new official buildings, the provision of commercial and industrial zones, and the plotting of a clear and comprehensive plan of the city, which should enable developers to make "sus inversiones en inmuebles, con la seguridad y garantía de una valorización de los barrios de la Ciudad". For the surroundings of Caracas, it was recommended to link the diverse centres of the city by rapid traffic roads; to solve the problem of working-class housing; and to prevent construction on sites which were not available or equipped for urbanization - thus officially tackling the emerging problem of shanty towns (GDF, 1939: 25). In respect of this, a later ordinance issued by the GDF was to allot the appropriate grounds where working-class families with many children could build their houses (GMDF, 13-I-1940).

Despite the wide package of general proposals, the PMC's main concern focused on the so-called indispensable works, whose execution always represented a relatively small expenditure which still had a considerable importance for the whole plan of a city.

"En efecto, el carácter estético de todas las ciudades lo determina la ejecución de una porción de ella, a menudo insignificante en relación con la superficie total. La ciudad de París, por ejemplo, ha sido completamente delineada por la ejecución del eje de los Campos Elíseos y las Plazas de La Estrella y de La Concordia; la ciudad de Berlín, por Unter den Linden; la ciudad de Londres, por su Picadilly Circus, etc." (GDF, 1939: 31).

In view of the decisive importance of aesthetic works in those examples, the PMC gave priority to the execution of the monumental works, headed by the construction of the 30-m-wide Avenida Central, forked into diagonals at both extremes - western El Calvario and eastern Los Caobos. Crowned by a Sagrario devoted to the Liberator, new public buildings reinforced the monumental character along the Avenue. The widening of other central streets was also prompted, together with the construction of municipal markets and working-class shelters (GDF, 1939: 32). The way for the implementation of some of these reforms was cleared by banning and even revoking permissions which were not adjusted to the PMC's new dispositions (31-III-1939, *Digesto Municipal*, 1939: 651-52; GMDF, 27-VII-1939).

"...il n'y a plus des gens qui croient que faire de l'urbanisme consiste à tracer d'axes"

G. Bardet, "Vingt ans d'urbanisme appliqué" (1939)

## BETWEEN "HAUSSMANNISME AMÉLIORÉ" AND MODERNITY

22. Now that the contents of the PMC in their original version have been summarized, it is time to present the main strands of the critique which has interpreted and assessed Rotival's proposal throughout this century. However, rather than evaluating the actual suitability of the plan for Caracas - a question which has absorbed a great deal of the critics' energies - attention in this case must be focused on the Haussmannian legacy of the PMC, trying at the same time to explore other urbanistic sources which might have inspired it. Particular notice must be paid to the Avenida Central - which came to be known as the Avenida Bolívar - since the bulk of the criticisms have been addressed to this detailed proposition of the PMC, which was supported in the original document with a graphic interpretation made in Paris. Lastly, some remarks must be made in relation to how the PMC moulded both the later monumentality and the modernity of the Venezuelan capital.

Even before the PMC came to light, the suitability of an urban renewal as an option for the centre of 1930s Caracas was a major question which then and afterwards involved endless discussion. When Allen was shown the proposal, the Senator apparently received a justification given in terms of the physical restrictions of the city and the theoretical principles of both Rotival and the local team:

"Nestling in a valley between mountains, it isn't possible to make a city on hitherto unoccupied grounds. Even if it were, such a movement would be

contrary to the philosophy both of the Paris architect and of the government commission. They do not wish to ruin the old locations but to give them added value by new civic beauty. They plan to establish new centers in old places, combining utility and grace, which will restrain the rapidly growing city from drifting too far into the canyons or up the mountain sides" (Allen, 1940: 272).

At the same time, the urban surgery was supposed to solve the traffic problem and the general stagnation of the city, as Bergamín first recognized in a conference at the UCV in December 1939; the Spaniard maintained the same point of view when the reforms began to be criticized: despite the PMC's possible flaws, the order brought about by the proposal was in any case positive for a city which had been in deadlock for such a long time (Bergamín, 1959: 36, 46).

Beyond that lenient gratefulness, modern critics reject both the alleged impossibility of the extension of Caracas, and the validity of the experts' philosophy. Without taking into account the availability of grounds - which was not comparable with their shortage in nineteenth-century Paris - Rotival blindly embraced the experiences of Haussmann and Napoleon III, without even looking at Cerdá's plan for Barcelona and other nineteenth-century examples of plans, which were more respectful of the historic centres. Furthermore, even the EFU treated with tact the medinas of Tunis and Algiers and the historic city of Saigon, where European-like tissues were juxtaposed to the traditional centres. Instead, in the case of Caracas, the French placed the new city over the traditional *damero* - which was thus sacrificed to speculative activities (Zawisza, 1985: 47-48). Although Nava criticized at that moment the foreign plan which tried to mortgage the future of Caracas (1971: 804), the hidden calculations of the French renewers were



unmasked and further attacked later on. Blindly following Haussmann's example, the opposition of the PMC to the vicious movement towards the east was in fact an aggressive justification of an urbanism affected by the speculative operation. The prospective benefits of such a practice for the Caraquenian bourgeoisie - still in a "cataleptic state" in relation to French culture - was the sole explanation for the general absence of contemporary opposition to Rotival's proposal (Zawisza, 1989: 18-19; Martín, 1991: 89-90).

Nevertheless, there are more positive interpretations of the story. Looking at the process from his recollection as a witness, Martínez Olavarría recently justified the intervention in the centre for the sake of the geopolitical goals of the PMC, given that

"las opciones formales del plan estaban fundadas sobre una proposición de reactivación y fortalecimiento de las actividades del centro en vista de las importantes funciones que se le asignaban a la ciudad. Ese centro estaba sufriendo un proceso acelerado de deterioro que podía inducir a una fuga de las actividades más dinámicas hacia otros sectores del valle, conduciendo al colapso de las áreas centrales. De modo que la esencia de la intervención se condensaba en un conjunto de acciones destinadas a revitalizar el centro, revirtiendo la tendencia al deterioro" (Negrón, 1991: 149).

In that case, Rotival's conception of the strategic importance of the urban plan for Caracas was thoroughly consistent, from the global level of the PMC to the spatial surgery in the centre. It was a conception which, "*ournée vers l'avenir et s'appuyant sur les nécessités géopolitiques*", was also applied by Prost's associate in the cases of post-war reconstruction in French cities ("Maurice Rotival...", 1980). At the same time, Rotival's proposal was also consistent with his eclectic understanding of modern urbanism - at least as it

had been summarized in his 1935 article. Beyond the Haussmannian-like renewal of the centre, Rotival also incorporated some elements of functional modernity into the PMC, such as the introduction of the car into the centre of the city, the enhancement of streets which tried to become motorways, and the adoption of zoning. In that respect, Rotival's Haussmannian modernity would have combined an academic treatment of central Caracas with a functionalist approach to the outer zones of the city (Jaua, 1991: 135-37, 141; Negrón, 1991: 154). The theoretical necessity of this differentiation was to be confirmed some years later by Rotival himself, who would distinguish between the urbanist of the centre and the urbanist of "l'unité de voisinage" (1966: 43-44).

23. As the highlight of the French team's monumental conception, the Avenida Central has attracted the bulk of the architectural critique about the PMC. The first question has to do with the striking similarity of the new avenue with the Champs Elysées - a model not only mentioned in the original plan but also recognized and justified by Rotival himself some years later. Calling upon the principles of modern urbanism, Rotival claimed that the new avenue was necessary as a spinal column which could reaffirm and revive the organic system of Caracas (1960a: 72; 1966: 180-81). Furthermore, the structural necessity of such an axis was finally endorsed even by members of the generation of Venezuelan architects who had originally opposed the PMC: since Caracas had been a city without a nineteenth century, there had to be created a great avenue in the twentieth. In this respect, despite their original criticism of the fascistic boulevard, some of those architects regret that the Versailles-like plan was not carried out fully, since it would have been a guide which could have prevented the later

fragmentation of metropolitan Caracas (Martínez Olavarría and others, 1983: 61; Schael and others, 1989: 41). These honest recognitions, however, do not solve the problem of the unjustified implantation of such a Parisian-like boulevard in a city like Caracas, whose urban patchwork made her quite different from the linear tissue of Paris. In any case, the organic expansion by *urbanizaciones* in 1930s Caracas made her case more similar to the urbanization of estates in nineteenth-century London - which certainly did not require any great axis to articulate its metropolitan structure. And it is not a question of opposing monumental boulevards as such: given the considerable scale of its blocks and skyscrapers, the adoption of great avenues appeared to be more justified in the case of Le Corbusier's plan for Buenos Aires (Zawisza, 1989: 18, 22-23).

Although its main buildings were proposed and designed by Lambert - as Martínez Olavarría recently pointed out (1983: 58) - the architectural attire of the Frenchified avenue has also attracted the same sort of criticisms to Rotival. Besides its Cartesian symmetry, artificially forked at both extremes, the eclectic parade of public edifices reinforced the Beaux-Arts image of the ensemble. Eclecticism was perspectively crowned by the pyramidal Sagrario del Libertador - a curious symbiosis between the tomb of Napoleon in Les Invalides and the Pyramid of the Moon in Teotihuacan (Zawisza, 1985: 49; 1989: 25; Negrón, 1991: 155). Despite this reference to a pre-Columbian past which Caracas never had - though it might be valid for the French team's pretensions for the new capital of a Caribbean civilization - the monumentality and eclecticism of the Avenida have been defended lately by a modernistic revision. In conformity with his Haussmannian modernity in urbanism, Rotival's architectural eclecticism permitted him to use neoclassical and academic styles in official edifices, combined with more

modern attempts in other types of buildings. After all, that combination mirrored the actual inability of avant-garde architecture to convey the grandeur required by the state - a schizophrenic dilemma suffered by the modern movement at that time (Jaua, 1991: 139-42). Furthermore, Martínez Olavarría has confirmed that the Avenida was designed following modern principles and according to an explicit preoccupation with the functional, formal and symbolic aspects of the PMC, whose political aims, however, required an academic treatment of the axis (Negrón, 1991: 155).

From the beginning, the fate of the Avenida was thus its ambivalence between monumentality and modernity, aggravated by its functional and segregational aftermath. Initially supposed to be a modern road to solve the problem of traffic - the necessity for which had been recognized in previous proposals - the avenue turned out to be presented and treated by the PMC as a monumental axis, with more aesthetic than functional resonances. This is why, after welcoming the surgery, Bergamín soon noticed that the avenue was not wide enough to solve the traffic problems of the centre, while the grounds reserved for its construction were expected to soar in value in the booming Caracas of the 1940s (1959: 60-64). Once construction work had begun on the Avenida Bolívar in 1945, not only were Bergamín's forecasts confirmed, but also the effects on the urban structure were seen to represent the worst of modern segregation. Caracas was thereafter fractured into two halves: the north captured most of the dynamism of the oil-exporter capital, whereas the south became economically stagnated and socially deteriorated. The urban wounds could only start healing many decades later, with the superficial renovation made possible by the underground system (Almandoz, 1991; Pedemonte, 1991). Still a burning question for the city, the urbanistic and architectural trial of the Avenida is far from being over.

24. The modern debate about the real success of the French mission in Caracas is not finished, either. On the one hand, the envoys' arrival in the DU certainly fuelled some urbanistic innovations, from the controls on private initiative in the city, to the introduction of new planning skills, such as zoning and the property register. But on the other hand, French urbanistic methodology was still very much based on intuitions and "pret-à-porter" solutions, which explained its scant effectiveness in foreseeing and controlling the urban growth of the capital in the long term (Lander and Rangel, 1970: 14; Martín, 1991: 93). In this respect - looked back on in comparison with the contemporary advances of Germany and Britain - the outdated principles of French colonial urbanism remain as a source of remorse and doubt for Caraqueñians: did we knock at the wrong door? (Martín, 1994: 355-56, 362).

The pangs of conscience about French urbanism have been aggravated by the problem of the eclectic monumentality of the PMC. In this respect, it has been asserted that, by the late 1930s, the EFU's formalistic aesthetic was already obsolete and exhausted in the international context, including the major Latin American capitals (Zawisza, 1985: 50). At the same time, it has been necessary to come to terms with the grand manners of Rotival in his Caracas mission, since his modernistic background merely turned out to be a mixture between logic and eclecticism (Jaua, 1991: 133). However, Gwendolyn Wright's explanation of the case studies of French colonial urbanism provide a sort of consolation for Caraqueñians. In their interventions in colonial cities, avant-garde architects sometimes challenged the rigidity of European modernity, by drawing images from the Beaux-Arts

past and juxtaposing them to exotic motifs and rational principles. French urbanists sometimes preferred to compromise purity of expression in order to temper the possible disruptions caused by the sudden introduction of modernity in colonial societies, especially in the context of fast-changing cities (Wright, 1991: 10). In that respect, Haussmann's revival in the semi-colonial PMC could also be explained as a tempering of the modernity of Rotival and his team, which would thus have been seeking a cautious formula for post-dictatorial Caracas. All in all - despite Bardet's belief that this tendency was already over in French urbanism by 1939 - the PMC offered a belated example of "Haussmannisme amélioré".

However, beyond recrimination and self-reproach, the French mission must be assumed by Caraqueñians as the last yet inexorable urban chapter of the cultural predominance of Paris in their city. Following the affair started by Guzmán's urban art and continued with the *belle époque*, Caracas naturally had to summon the French in order to father its emerging urbanism - the capital's final proof of devotion at the crucial moment of its long delayed reforms. In this respect, considered as the final episode of the French-oriented devotion, the essential continuity of the PMC with Guzmanian urban art was penetratingly summarized by Martín Vegas, when remarking that the Illustrious American would have embraced with relish the whole of Rotival's plan (Martínez Olavarría and others, 1983: 59). Half a century after Guzmán, the old tradition of Beaux-Arts could only produce a stillborn plan for Caracas; but the disappointing experience was perhaps necessary for the Americanized capital, in order to come to terms with the exhaustion of its Frenchified past.

**"...De même que la Rome antique plaçait l'architecte à la droite de l'empereur, aujourd'hui le planificateur est, aux États-Unis, plaçait à la droite du président, du gouverneur de l'État ou du maire de la ville."**

**Maurice Rotival, "Planification et Urbanisme" (1964)**

## **TOWARDS AMERICAN PLANNING**

**25. A military graduate who was Minister of Guerra y Marina with López Contreras's administration, General Isafas Medina Angarita became, in 1940, the official candidate in the first presidential elections that Venezuela had undergone in more than forty years. At that time, the candidate was sent to the United States, on an official mission which was incorrectly given the connotation of an attempt to get Washington's approval. Not only was he endorsed by Roosevelt, but General Medina was actually elected by an overwhelming majority as the new President of Venezuela for the period 1941-45, a post which he assumed only a few days after having married in New York (Chiossone, 1989: 191). By the end of his first year in the presidency, the bombing of Pearl Harbor made Medina finally assume a public alliance with the northern neighbour - a step which Gómez had avoided in World War I. As the president would recollect some years later,**

**"el día trágico de Pearl Harbor marcó para Venezuela la hora de resoluciones difíciles. No dudé un solo instante en seguir el camino que, con toda claridad, señalaban al país su espíritu democrático, sus anhelos porque en el mundo reinara la justicia, y su espíritu combativo contra los sistemas dictatoriales, fuera de que nuestros propios intereses económicos y nuestra situación geográfica nos colocaban necesariamente al lado de los Estados Unidos de América, primera nación atacada por la furia ya desencadenada en el mundo" (Medina, 1963: 53).**

In fact, the two nations had worked together since 1940, when the Nazis had taken Holland and threatened the Dutch Caribbean islands so close to Venezuela's oil fields; the United States then provided its protégé with lend-lease funds to train its army and replace its tankers sunk by German submarines, while the Venezuelan government expropriated a German-owned railway. Besides breaking with the Axis and deciding Venezuela's position in World War II, Medina's manifesto confirmed, for the rest of the century, the economic and technical adhesion of the oil-exporter country to its major customer (Bailey and Nasatir, 1960: 670).

In terms of public works, the links between the Medina government and the New Deal administration would include the latter's financial aid for urbanistic projects in Venezuela, as well as the creation of a MOP branch in New York - criticized at that time by Medina's opponents (Medina, 1963: 96). For the booming capital with a population of 269,030, the new local government issued in 1942 an *Ordenanza sobre Arquitectura, Urbanismo y Construcciones en general*, which contemplated the elaboration of so-called "Planos Reguladores" for the different regions of Caracas - a major step towards the later adoption of modern zoning. The ordinance's definition of urbanism embraced

"el desarrollo adecuado de una ciudad o poblado siguiendo las normas o leyes dictadas a tal efecto como son: las relativas al saneamiento de la misma, al ornato, facilidad de tránsito en sus calles y avenidas, plazas y parques públicos, a la higiene, ornato, comodidad y estética de sus edificios y en general, a todos los preceptos establecidos para la comodidad y seguridad de sus habitantes" (arts. 110, CMDF, 1942: 12).

Apart from providing a legal basis for the process of order started by the PMC - "Orden en la casa, orden en los edificios, orden en las calles, orden



en la ciudad...", as Bergamín celebrated in those days (1959: 46-47) - the 1942 Ordenanza thus put together in legal terms all the urbanistic strands defined by the previous episodes of the history of Caracas.

26. Despite the all-embracing spirit of the ordinance, Medina's government was to distance itself from the monumental urbanism of the previous administration, which in some way still represented the transition from the *ancien regime* into the democratic republic. As the PMC had been reduced to a mere "Plan Director de Calles y Avenidas" by the end of López's period, the monumental forum of the west was to be replaced by a housing project, more appropriate to the social targets of the populist administration. The change of use was favoured by the new Governor of Caracas, Diego Nucete Sardi, who managed to get credit for the project from the Washington Eximbank (García, 1985: 82; Martín, 1994: 373). Nucete's private reasons for the change were confessed to Osorio, while the former director of the BO offered a brandy to the Colombian visitor in his house: "Es absurdo el querer conservar las ciudades viejas. Ellas son como los automóviles viejos: hay que cambiarlas cuando ya no se adaptan a la época. Para qué esa acumulación de ratas, contagios inevitables y techos vencidos?" (Osorio, 1943: 61). Though somewhat simplistic in relation to his appreciation of old cities, the straightforward Governor was right in relation to El Silencio - a red-light slum on the western side of central Caracas, frequented by French prostitutes since the late Gómez era.

Repeating an authoritarian style of decision making which had often appeared in the history of Caracas, Nucete commended to Villanueva the urban renewal of El Silencio, after a public contest which also included a

project by Guinand - another of the DU's original advisers. After his neo-colonial *quintas* in El Rosal and the Country Club, Villanueva had experimented with a more modern language in educational and cultural projects during the 1930s, inspired by the French version of Mallet Stevens and Lurat. In the case of El Silencio, the solution adopted was conciliatory on both the urban and architectural levels: although the civic use of the original forum was changed, Villanueva explicitly respected the location of El Silencio as a *rond point* of the PMC system of avenues. At the same time - referring to Bardet's concept of domestic step - Villanueva rescued Venezuela's traditional patio as the central element for the design of the blocks. Each self-contained building housed between 50 and 150 families plus basic urban services; however, the idea of the 7 blocks as neighbourhood units was rejected by the architect himself: the ensemble should keep its connection with the urban organism of Caracas, especially through the new Avenida Bolívar - an intention which refutes later allegations of an anti-urban ideology in the project (Villanueva, 1966: 24; García, 1985: 41). In terms of the style, Villanueva searched for a link with the basic architecture of the colonial city, whose restoration was epitomized by the arcades around the central patios; the eclecticism of the project also included touches of Viennese and German housing, Beaux-Arts lay-outs and CIAM criteria (García, 1985: 85-87). All in all - according to Villanueva's later recognition - the enterprise of creating a modern vocabulary for Venezuela's colonial architecture was analogous to the procedures used by the master Prost in the new colonial cities of northern Africa (Villanueva, 1966: 24).

Inaugurated by Medina in July 1944, El Silencio thereafter stood as a major achievement of his administration, and also as a milestone in the shift towards the new structure and dynamics of metropolitan Caracas. Osorio not

only thought that the project evoked the best areas of modern Vienna, but should also be imitated in Bogotá and other Latin American cities (1943: 62-63). After Nucete's work "aumentaron con prontitud los grandes edificios, porque El Silencio fue escuela para muchos, y la industria de la construcción comenzó allí su etapa de pujante desarrollo", recollected the president (Medina, 1963: 134). Given the final construction of the PMC's avenues around El Silencio, the change of use from monumental to residential has been questioned at times from the urbanistic point of view; but the ensemble has generally been recognized as a success, especially from the architectural perspective. Villanueva's rejection of the exotic monumentality of Beaux-Arts not only represented the first step towards a vernacular modernism, but also the recuperation of good taste in Caraquenian architecture, after the prolonged era of Frenchified copies initiated by Guzmán (Uslar Pietri, 1951: 526; Zawisza, 1985: 50, 55). Rather than just anticipating the functionalism of his later interventions in the city, Villanueva launched in El Silencio a new tradition of modernity for metropolitan Caracas (Gasparini and Posani, 1969: 368, 381).

Rotival's own reactions to the change of use in El Silencio were illustrative of the functional rationality of the times to come. Although he was allegedly upset when told of the replacement (Negrón, 1991: 153), the PMC's deviser consoled himself with the idea that Haussmann's Paris and Prost's colonial cities were the sole exceptions which confirmed the rule that urbanists can never see their plans fully realized. At the same time, looking back at the European bourgeoisie of the baroque city, which wanted to remain in the urban centre, Rotival questioned himself about the pointless construction of monumental avenues for modern bourgeois who preferred to live 20 kms away from central Caracas. So he decided to praise BO's and Villanueva's

attempt to set in the skeleton of the embryonic metropolis the cheap housing for those groups who did want to remain in the centre, and whose accommodation was in fact one of the original targets of the PMC. In this respect, given the usual financial restrictions on public housing projects, Rotival recognized that the incorporation of commercial activities into the grounds made out of El Silencio a rare example of an economically balanced "housing scheme", which certainly contributed to the urban diversity representative of central areas of Latin cities (Rotival, 1966: 171, 176-79). So, even for the French master, El Silencio thus succeeded in demonstrating how monumental urbanism was a remnant of the *ancien regime* in the post-dictatorial capital.

27. After the 1945 coup d'état which overthrew him, Medina was exiled in New York, where he was to write the memoirs of his presidential period. After flirting for some weeks with exuberant blondes in Miami Beach at the beginning of his exile - a premonitory hint of the Florida extravaganza which was to seduce Venezuelans, and still does - the protagonist of *Allá en Caracas* also chose New York as the place which would provide him with the necessary perspective to write his novel about the *belle époque* in Caracas and Paris. Prior to his departure, during the days when the French capital was being released by the allied armies, Caraquenians still listened to some French songs featured in the New York hit parade (Vallenilla Lanz, hijo, 1954: 332-34). But, after the end of World War II, the Americans' cultural predominance was definitive at all levels of Caraquenian society (Schael, 1966: 197).

In those years, monumental urbanism was consigned to oblivion in the

growing metropolis. Though the former CTU could survive with different names until 1948 - when all trace of it was lost - the new governmental board which took over from Medina entrusted the problem of the development of Caracas to new national organisations (Azpúrua, 1964: 32-33). Created by the same decree on August 10, 1946, both the MOP's Dirección de Urbanismo and the Comisión Nacional de Urbanismo (CNU) mirrored the importance acquired by the new discipline at the public level. Among the CNU's original members were some of the CTU's, such as Martínez Olavarría, Pardo Stolk and Villanueva. However - as Legórburu recently noticed - the modernization of the urban administration was to involve a general replacement of the veterans formed in Europe with new generations of Venezuelan professionals trained in the United States (Schael and others, 1989: 48). One of the first advisers appointed by the CNU was Francis Violich, who came from the Berkeley School of Architecture; the newcomer immediately noticed that "a renaissance in thinking" was taking place among young Venezuelan engineers and architects: they were "eager to demonstrate their unused capacities" for urban planning, after having studied abroad or in the school of architecture which had recently appeared in the UCV (Violich, 1975: 280; Caraballo, 1986: 77).

Another international adviser of the CNU, from the late 1940s on, was once again Rotival, who this time appeared before his former Venezuelan apprentices dressed in a North American attire. Working by then at Yale University, the rejuvenated planner came with a great concern about region - an ambit that the Rotival of the "grands ensembles" did not seem to pay so much attention to. The post-war urbanist also demanded consideration of financial aspects to the working method of planning; using a distinction that he was to formulate some years later, one can say that the former "urbaniste"

wanted to be considered now as a "planificateur", the new right-hand man of North American statesmen (Rotival, 1956: 13; 1964: 42; Martínez Olavarría and others, 1983: 60). Distinguishing between the urbanist of the "centre" and the urbanist of "des unités des voisinage", Rotival confined both of them to the domain of the city, whose ultimate incorporation into the domain of the region could only be accomplished by the planner. The latter also was the only one who could orchestrate the general concept resulting from the inputs provided by diverse specialists, including architects and urbanists. In accordance with his American experience, Rotival considered the so-called architect-urbanist as a hybrid which could be dangerous in terms of planning, "parce que l'urbaniste s'est jusqu'ici préoccupé de composition architecturale mais a, en fait, ignoré la planification". This is why Rotival the planner finally encouraged urbanists to abandon their mere architectural concerns and to assume the planning challenge for which they could be empowered:

"Vous ne devez pas laisser la place vide, car si vous ne vous en souciez pas, si vous ne pensez pas votre profession au regard de la planification, cette place sera immédiatement occupée, sans doute, par des hommes remarquables, qui auront peut-être tous les titres que confèrent nos grandes écoles, mais qui ne seront logiquement pas des planificateurs. Et alors, le bateau, risque d'échouer." (Rotival, 1964: 45).

The members of the CNU were also able to perceive that there was still a difference between Rotival's "macrocosmic" vision of planning and the "microcosmic" vision by Francis Violich. The former seemed to promote a short or "fast approach" as a methodology which could select basic factors and formulate hypotheses without knowing the whole planning situation. Instead, Violich brought a method based on the detailed knowledge of zones, as the only way to formulate instruments of urban control (Martínez

Olavarría and others, 1983: 64-66; Martín, 1991: 106). So, despite all his tackle as a planner, there was still an echo of the French intuitive approach to the city in Rotival the urbanist. And there were also vestiges of monumentality in his innovative proposal for the Centro Simón Bolívar - a modernistic ensemble of high-rise office buildings with underground parking, which became the germ of the Caracas of the skyscrapers (Negrón, 1991: 153).

But the grand manners of French urbanism had definitely surrendered their supremacy to the wonders of functional planning coming from North America, a process which was to be emphasized in the decades to come. As Violich was to summarize in the 1970s - when writing for a compilation which featured Caracas as one of the *World Capitals* - the dilemma before the local urban planners throughout these decades was "the question of a conceptual approach on which to base the institutional process. A latter-day Beaux Arts movement inspired the late 1930s, and a social orientation, the mid-1940s, only to give way in the early 1950s to a functional approach drawing on North American techniques" (Violich, 1975: 285). In these years, when the UCV appointed a commission to explore the incorporation of urban studies into the architectural curriculum, La Sorbonne was included only as another case study amongst the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Reenslar Polytechnic Institute and the Universities of California, Cornell, Yale, Wisconsin and Toronto (Arnal, 1957: 4-5). Young Caraqueñian planners no longer wanted to build an "Old World-like" city.

## V CONCLUSIONS

1. Although Caracas has traditionally been disregarded as an important recipient of the European urbanism imported to Latin America since the mid-nineteenth century, the Venezuelan capital can be seen as a *sui generis* example of an "Old World-like" city. The oblivion was mainly due to the fact that the urbanistic transfer from Europe into Caracas cannot be appreciated on the ostensible scale of the major Latin American capitals, where monumental avenues and edifices have been taken as proofs of an urbanistic transfer - which still need to be demonstrated in many cases, however. Given the continental backwardness of the Cinderella of South America during most of the period considered, the Caraqueniens' dream of Europe was rather interlaced with a more delicate thread - a thread which was not visible in yesterdays' engravings of the tiny capital, or in today's pictures of the Americanized metropolis.

From the petit salons of the oligarchs to the Europeanized fashion of the Caraqueniens beauties, from the forgotten impressions of travellers in the "Paris of South America" to the urban desires expressed in letters, discourses and plans by the Venezuelan rulers, the subtler vestiges of Europe's urban presence in Caracas have to be pursued in the domains of an elite fascinated by the glamorous culture of the Old World. As happened during the Guzmanian reforms and the *belle-époque* extravaganza, this cultural fascination was partly due to the economic and political presence of European powers in Venezuelan society. Nevertheless, instead of being a cultural imposition entailed by the interests of European capital, the urban



importation has proved to be an expression of the cultural needs of the Venezuelan elite, eager to strengthen its links with European metropolises.

Included in the agenda imported from Europe by that elite, the reforms which underpinned Venezuela's modern urbanism were but one set of ideas amongst a more extensive baggage of urban culture - a fact which is essential for understanding the emergence of the technical discipline during this period. This relationship between urban culture and urbanism has apparently been disregarded in many of the approaches to the problem of European transfer into Latin capitals, which have merely been concerned with tracing architectural or morphological similarities in the urban tissue, without exploring other domains of the urban culture. This misconception has been more dramatic in the case of Caracas, especially in relation to the Guzmanian city, where the absence of urbanistic transformations made critics force comparisons with Haussmannian Paris on the basis of an architectural resemblance.

In order to correct that misinterpretation, it is necessary to accept that the scale and backwardness of Caracas during most of the period under consideration impeded the implementation of European urbanism in the same way and at the same time as happened in the major Latin capitals. However - as I hope to have demonstrated - this restriction must not prevent us from recognizing a *Europeanized Caracas*, which flourished in terms of the ideas and urban culture patronized by the Venezuelan elite. Such a revelation has only been made possible by adopting a conception of urbanism which goes beyond its technical and morphological limits. I hope that this broader conception can illuminate the way in which the transfer of European ideas should be approached by the urban historiography of Latin

America in general, as well as for the case of Caracas.

2. The importance of that European-oriented period for the emergence of modern culture in Caracas has traditionally been overlooked in Venezuela's urban historiography, just as much as the urbanistic continuity of the episodes involved has often been misinterpreted by the fragmentary approaches to the period. However - after this uninterrupted journey through some stations of its urban history - the continuity of a *European cycle* in the history of Caracas can now be recognized, both in terms of urban culture and urbanistic breakthroughs; let us now try to articulate the elements of that cycle.

As some Venezuelan thinkers have pointed out, much of Guzmán's urban project was certainly the conspicuous preparation for a pretentious fiesta. In accordance with his search for progress and civilization, infrastructure and ornamentation were the two main strands of a project indefatigably masterminded by Guzmán himself, on the battlefield as well as in cabinet meetings, in decrees and ordinances as well as in letters to Ana Teresa. Those ingredients were assembled in the concept of public works, one of the Guzmanato's major contributions to Venezuela's urban administration. With its two departments of town ornamentation and infrastructure, the creation of the MOP epitomized the twofold project of the president, who was thereby enabled to dress the tiny capital in an architectural attire worthy of a continental hostess. Those are the works traditionally taken as Guzmán's sole contribution to Caracas, and which are therefore criticized for being carried out without an integral plan. However, in this respect it must be considered that - despite all its festive euphoria - Guzmanian Caracas never

required urban surgery, as the major Latin American capitals did. Modern criticisms of Guzmán's lack of a comprehensive plan should therefore look at the pathetic mismatch from a different perspective: Caracas always remained too small a capital for the ambitious president, who probably had to deny himself his hidden dreams of breaking through its colonial boundaries.

But Guzmán's urban project was *more than a fiesta* of public works: it also encompassed a contribution to municipal administration which has been often ignored by architectural critics. With its apparatus of decrees and ordinances, and especially with the 1871 *Ordenanza sobre Policía Urbana y Rural* - a piece apparently forgotten in the urban historiography of Venezuela - the Guzmanato also boosted the regulation of municipal life, thus enlarging the traditional limits of urban policing. In this respect, the cleanliness and appearance of streets, monuments and houses, the controls on public behaviour and the improvement of transport were different yet complementary components of the first modern agenda that Caracas had in the republican era. Complementing the architectural dignity which was striven after in his public edifices, Guzmán's municipal agenda also sought an urban decorum worthy of a progressive and civilized capital of the nineteenth century. In terms of Guzmanian decorum, monumental edifices were apparently as important as public services and public behaviour - an all-embracing conception of urban culture that today's metropolitan Caracas has long since forgotten, under the pretext of its successive crises.

Imbued with political resentments against the Venezuelan Napoleon, the critique of Guzmán's urban project on account of its alleged imitation of Haussmannian Paris lacks both historical and urbanistic bases. Even though

*Hausmann was in the air*, the morphological Hausmannization cannot be traced in Caracas, nor can the Prefect's theoretical presence be proved in the urban debate of Guzmanian Venezuela. The eclecticism of Second-Empire Paris certainly was an architectural reference for Hurtado Manrique and other favourites, inasmuch as Napoleon III seems to have been Guzmán's personal model, according to his opponents. However, if Hausmann's hygienical and economic principles were not yet recognized or applied in the first Hausmannian cycle of the major Latin American capitals, it was much harder for his urbanism of regularization to be grasped fully in the incipient urban debate within Guzmanian society. Even so, the Hausmannian question should not diminish the merit of *Guzmanian urban art*, whose search for monumental architecture and urban decorum, for infrastructure and ornamentation, established the bases of Venezuela's modern urbanism.

3. In terms of urban culture, Guzmán's fiesta of progress and civilization also set the bases for the incorporation of Caracas into the extravaganza of the *belle époque*. Thanks to the cultural renovation of the Guzmanato - and despite the crisis of identity provoked by the urban Delpiniada - Crespo's Caracas was able to keep a Europeanized ethos which was noticed by visitors from the New and the Old Worlds. In this respect, Davis's proclamation of the Venezuelan capital as "the Paris of South America" reaffirmed and exalted the urban miracle of Curtis's "one-story Paris". With Caivano's confirmation of Caracas as a product of the *fine-di-secolo* civilization, the continuity of Guzmán's Europeanism was granted - as the prolonged success of *El Cojo Ilustrado* would demonstrate. Even though the Colossus of the North beat Ariel in the economic and political arena of

Castro's bankrupt Venezuela, France and Europe were thus able to dominate the cultural fortress of Caracas until the end of the "bella época".

Nevertheless, that Frenchified image in the minds of visitors could never be endorsed by cosmopolitan Caraquenians, who realized that the gap between the parochial capital and the European metropolises they returned from was insuperable. The urban drama was displayed and resolved in different ways by the personae of Venezuelan *costumbrismo* and modernism throughout the first novels set in the city; among them, Alberto Soria's exile remains the most dramatic outcome of the miseries of that pseudo-European Caracas. As an interesting coincidence which illustrates the correspondence between different urban discourses, the backwardness of Alberto's capital was confirmed by Razetti and the leading voices of the sanitary movement. In view of the mortality syndrome and the restrictions of the capital, the fathers of modern medicine in Venezuela reinforced the warnings of the cosmopolitan characters of modernism: *belle-époque* Caracas was far from being a complete city.

The doctors' warnings made possible a silent revolution, hitherto unnoticed by Caraquenian historians. If one of the Guzmanato's contributions had been the new concern for cleanliness and appearance, the Caracas of Crespo and Castro witnessed the emergence of the debate on the importance of hygiene - the new parameter of European progress and civilization. The major outcome of the sanitary debate was the 1910 *Ordenanza de Policía Urbana y Rural*, which for the first time incorporated the requisites of modern hygiene into the traditional apparatus of the urban policing. In this respect, the 1910 *Ordenanza* can be said to be an urbanistic milestone as important as the consolidation of El Paraíso; however, less

ostensible than Chataing's arches or Malaussena's villas, the document remained scarcely known to Venezuela's urban historiographers - as also happened to Guzmán's 1871 ordinance. So it is now time to grasp the relevance of that document as the first outcome of a two-decade debate whereby Caracas became a health-conscious city prior to the Gómez era - which is assumed by modern approaches to be the start of the sanitary debate in Venezuela. Sanitary controls had placed Caracas on the threshold of urbanism by the late 1900s - not much later than those controls were introduced in the major Latin capitals. At least from the hygienical point of view, Castro's Caracas was *not so deeply asleep* as is often believed.

4. The Caracas of Gómez was not asleep, either. Fuelled by critics imbued with political rancour, the black legend has arisen from both a misconception of the dictator's urban project and an oblivion to the changes of Caracas during the 27 years of Gomezalato. The Benemérito's project of order and progress represented a mutation of the Ilustre Americano's progress and civilization, just as much as the mountain landlord was the opposite of the urbane Guzmán. If the latter's search for civilization was rather obliterated in the early Gomezalato, progress was certainly pursued through the growing investment in infrastructure. With the approval of the experts gathered in the 1911 Congreso de Municipalidades - an early milestone of Gómez's urban administration - communication and sanitation were endorsed as the new governmental priorities in terms of public works, while Razetti urged private initiative to take on its own responsibility in social hygiene. In this respect, although the hygienical agenda had originally been imported from Europe, Gómez's society, as things turned out, entrusted the fostering of sanitary matters to the Colossus of the North, thus mirroring the penetration of the

country by mighty new ambassadors such as the oil companies and the Rockefeller Foundation. In addition to sanitation - which became a national more than an urban question - a vast programme of roads eclipsed the protagonism that ornamentation had held in public works during the Guzmanato.

Until the Venezuelan debts had been paid, Gómez's project certainly favoured the province over the capital. The slight was suffered especially by Caraqueños returning from abroad to the rebuffed Caracas, whose cosmopolitan façade might look up-to-date as compared with provincial Venezuelan towns, but not with European or North American metropolises. The Caraqueño atmosphere was not European enough for María Eugenia Alonso and her confidants, nor was it for most of the well-travelled bourgeoisie of Pocaterra or Vallenilla Lanz hijo; nor could the punished capital be sufficiently liberal for the tragic intellectuals of Gallegos or Otero Silva. The renunciations and sacrifices made by the personae of Venezuelan realism characterized the second dramatic cycle of the late "bella época", epitomized by the creole Iphigenia's immolation of her Parisian dreams in the punished capital. But the cycle of sacrifices was concluded with Victoria Guanipa's redemption in the capital of the oil-exporter country, which confirms the entrance of Caracas into a new urban culture. Though both heroines might traverse the same city, María Eugenia's Caracas was still devoted to Paris and the European mythology, whereas Victoria's was already ruled by New York and North American wonders. Although it has apparently escaped the chroniclers, this replacement can be seen as the literary end of the "bella época".

In the oil-exporter bonanza of 1920s Venezuela, the Gómez administration

created a new urban agenda for the growing capital. Endless regulations on traffic were the first demonstration of governmental concern about the city since the spread of the car in Caracas, pampered by the Gómez society as the new fetish of progress. The urban sprawl of the new *urbanizaciones* also became a core issue of that agenda from the 1920s, after the expansion towards El Paraíso had been rejected from the sanitary and technical point of view. By building their new *quintas* in the eastern suburbs of Caracas, Gómez's bourgeoisie not only offered opportunities to newly-arrived architects to experiment with a fresher eclecticism, but also turned aside from the initial path of expansion set by Castro's plutocracy - a shift rarely seen in more traditional capitals of Latin America. In order to meet the new requirements of the congested city, the 1926 *Ordenanza de Policía Urbana y Rural* updated the hygienical and technical controls of its 1910 predecessor; later on, the 1930 *Ordenanza sobre Arquitectura Civil* was the first attempt to control the design and equipment of new areas. Lastly, the provision of working-class housing was finally recognized by the government with the creation of the Banco Obrero in 1928 - another major achievement of Gómez's urban administration.

So even accepting the traditional idea of the rebuff of the capital, the black legend of Gómez's "punished" Caracas must be regarded cautiously from the urbanistic perspective. On the one hand, it must be recognized that the Gómez administration bolstered the municipal competences of the urban policing - recognized for the first time in the 1925 Constitution - whilst issuing new laws and ordinances. Furthermore, through its late regulations on civil architecture, Gómez's progressivism finally succeeded in preserving and transmitting Guzmán's ornamental principles to new generations. On the other hand, it is true that the dictator did not undertake an urban plan for



Caracas - although the capital of the late Gomezalato *did* need such a plan. For this reason, the Gómez era has to be seen as an *extension of the* eve of urbanism which had started in Castro's Caracas - and not as a new urbanistic episode as such. However - although the Benemérito did not face an urban challenge which the Ilustre Americano would have relished - it must be recognized that the Gómez agenda on traffic, urban sprawl and housing reunited all the ingredients for the discussion on urban reforms in the democratic capital, which would mark the beginning of Venezuela's modern urbanism.

5. The paradox of a Frenchified plan for the Americanized capital of the late 1930s can only be solved by considering the European past of Caracas. As Allen and Fergusson celebrated in connection with their visits to the democratic country, López Contreras's Venezuela had become an enclave of North-American-educated technocrats. However, the booming society still faced a metropolitan dilemma which came from the times of María Eugenia and Victoria, and even touched the president himself: Paris or New York? Without solving this dilemma, the proposals for the reforms of the democratic capital succeeded in articulating the problems of Caracas in terms of urban renewal or expansion of the centre, and its connection with the eastern suburbs. At the same time, despite its simplistic interpretation of architectural modernism and the assumption that metropolitan growth involved a dichotomy between densification and garden cities, the specialized literature which started to arrive in professional journals reinforced the dilemma of the proposals: urban renewal or expansion?

The urban dilemmas were to be solved with the creation of the Dirección de

Urbanismo, which not only provided Venezuela's first example of an urban planning office, but also put an end to the Caraquenians' long-lasting irresolution. That Mibelli contracted the French team of urbanists can be partially explained by the president's predilections and the DU members' Parisian training, and it was also a way of opposing the allegedly communist councillors' preferences for other proposals. But, above all, the Governor's decision crowned the old Parisian dream of Caracas, begun in the Guzmanian fiesta and prolonged through the *belle-époque* extravaganza. Despite the irresistible advance of North American influence, at the historic moment of the Venezuelan capital's expansion, López's administration - probably unaware of the very *raison d'être* of the choice - once again honoured France as the cultural godmother of an era which was about to finish. *Noblesse oblige*.

The Venezuelan capital had a price to pay for its Frenchified aspirations. In a continent still seduced by the grand design of the EFU, the plan for Caracas ended up being one of the latest examples of "Haussmannisme amélioré" - which Poëte thought had been rooted out of French urbanism. From Prost's colonial experience in Africa to Rotival's theoretical appraisal of Haussmannian grandeur, the French team summoned to the Venezuelan capital had most of the ingredients of the EFU, which made possible Haussmann's final arrival in Caracas. In spite of the delay, the invocation of the Prefect was still politically opportune to bolster Governor Mibelli's courage against his opponents, as well as his concern for the city investors. The Haussmannian example also explained some of the PMC proposals, from the major decision on the renewal of the Caracas centre to the device of the Champs-Élysées-like Avenida Central.

But the Haussmannian surgery arrived in Caracas too late. Forgetting about that delay was, perhaps, the major fault of Rotival's embassy, at least in relation to the physical structure and dynamics of the embryonic metropolis. That was the main problem with the Avenida itself, long since recognized in pre-Rotival proposals as a necessity, but finally conceived by the PMC as a parade of Beaux-Arts monuments. For this reason, Rotival's subdued modernity in Caracas has aroused the most important reproaches laid against the original member of the CIAM generation. However, those criticisms seem to forget that, once again, *noblesse oblige*. As other ambassadors of French colonial urbanism did, Prost's young associate simply honoured in Caracas the French mission he was in charge of, thus tempering potentially disruptive modernity for the sake of a monumentality he thought to be more suitable for the post-*belle-époque* capital of a post-dictatorial regime. So, even though the PMC can be regarded as another example of "Haussmannisme amélioré", the plan must be looked back on as the unavoidable conclusion of a cycle begun by Guzmanian urban art, which could not embrace the Haussmannian dream in its own time.

The alterations to the PMC proved the exhaustion of the Frenchified era in the Americanized capital. Removing the Beaux-Arts vestiges of ceremonious monumentality from the centre of a Caracas craving for modernity, El Silencio was just the first manifestation of an embryonic metropolis whose bourgeoisie hastened to move to the suburbs - as Rotival had to recognize some years later. With the new importation of Violich, the reappearance of Rotival dressed as a planner, and the return of national technocrats from the United States, the era of Venezuelan planning began. The three European-oriented episodes which had led to the emergence of Caraquenian urbanism were over, and so was the Frenchified décor on the basis of which

that discipline had emerged. That which Violich would recollect many years later as the Caracas planners' abandonment of the late Beaux-Arts approach by the time of his arrival, was in fact the conclusion of a long European-oriented cycle which Caracas had gone through, as the major Latin American capitals had since the mid-nineteenth century. Despite Violich's omission in his first book, Caracas had also been an Old-World-like city.

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